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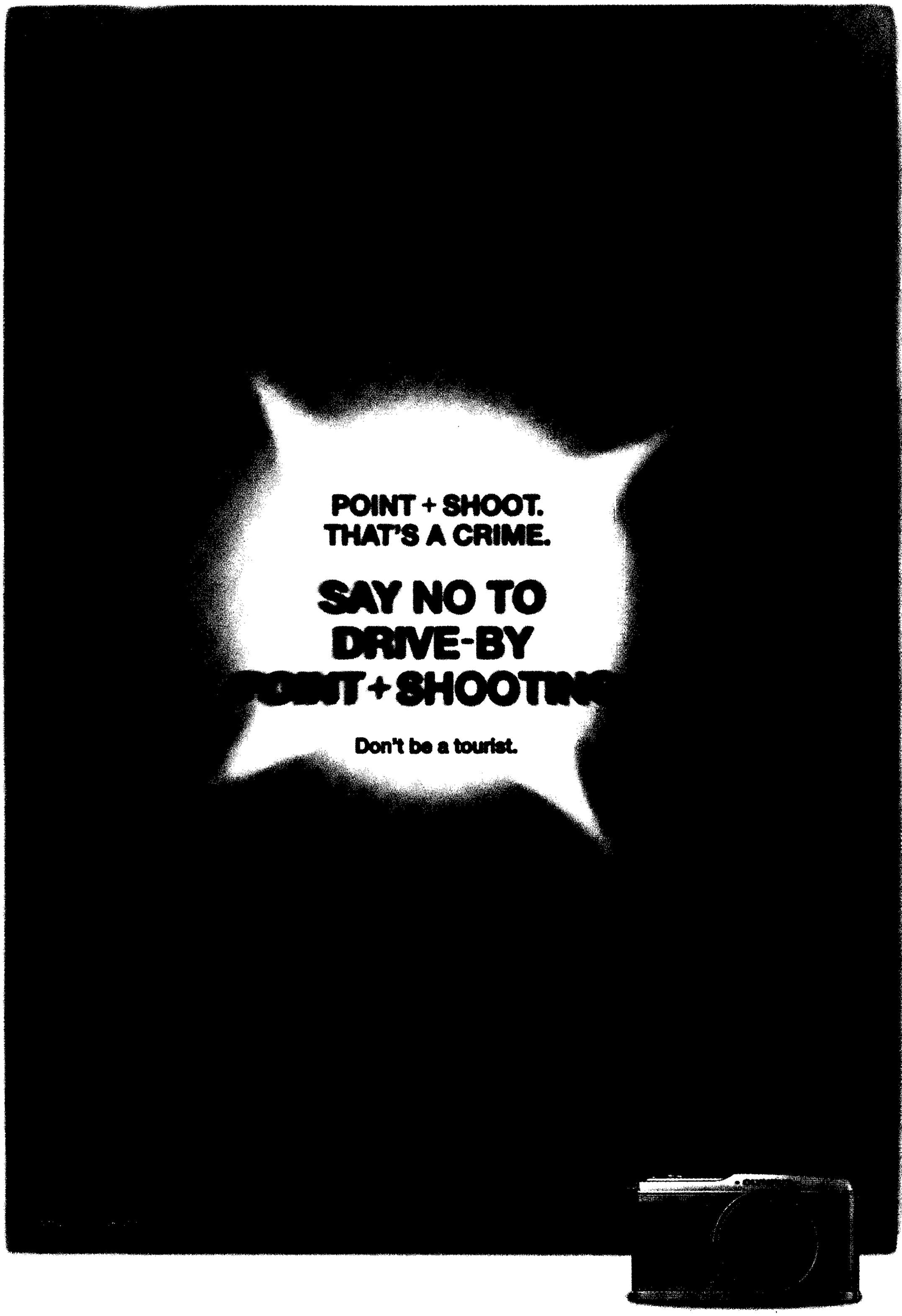

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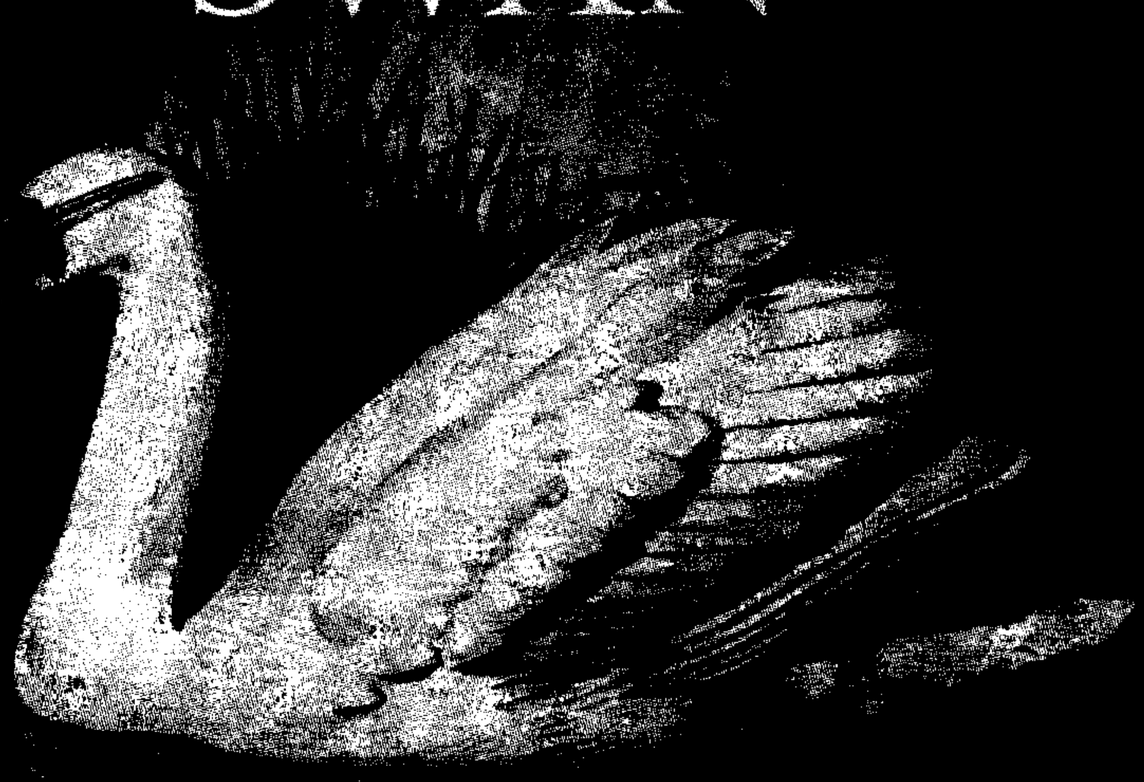

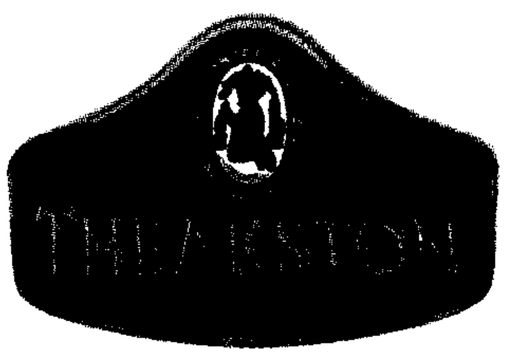

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Polarising opinions

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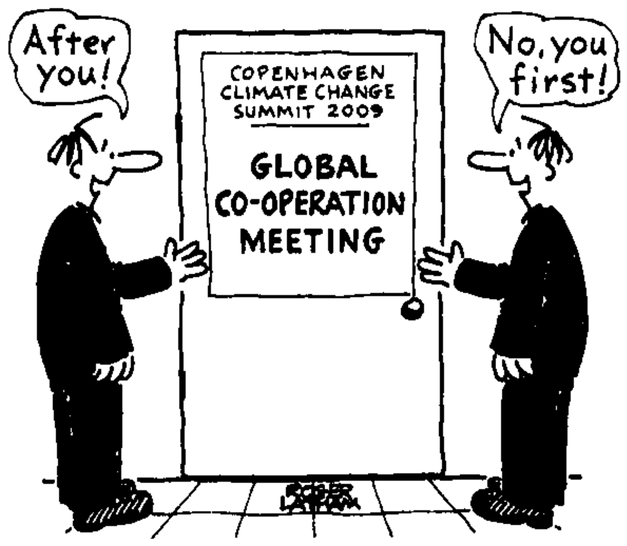
EYE TOLD YOU SO

AT LONG last the NHS National Programme for IT – the worst computer project even by this government's dire standards – looks set to be put out of its misery.

After years of ignoring evidence published by *the Eye* and others (including a 2007 special report in *Eye* 1179, "System Failure"), ministers have finally lifted their heads from the sand. Chancellor Alistair Darling told the BBC's Andrew Marr on Sunday: "The NHS had [sic] a quite expensive IT system that, frankly, isn't essential to the frontline. It's something I think we don't need to go ahead with just now."

This non-essential project has so far cost the taxpayer over £4bn and, since the ill-thought-out regional monopoly contracts that buggered it up in the first place won't be cheap to get out of, there will be more to come. Meanwhile, the crucial business of developing affordable healthcare IT has been set back almost a decade. In a rather feeble-looking compromise, health secretary Andy Burnham told the Commons on Monday that cancelling some parts of the scheme would save £600m.

Darling's dismissal of the programme as non-essential also contradicts a strong defence of the project from Gordon Brown just 10 months ago. Back then he argued with public accounts committee chairman Edward Leigh: "You want to abolish it. I say it is necessary." Except now it isn't. And never was.



EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

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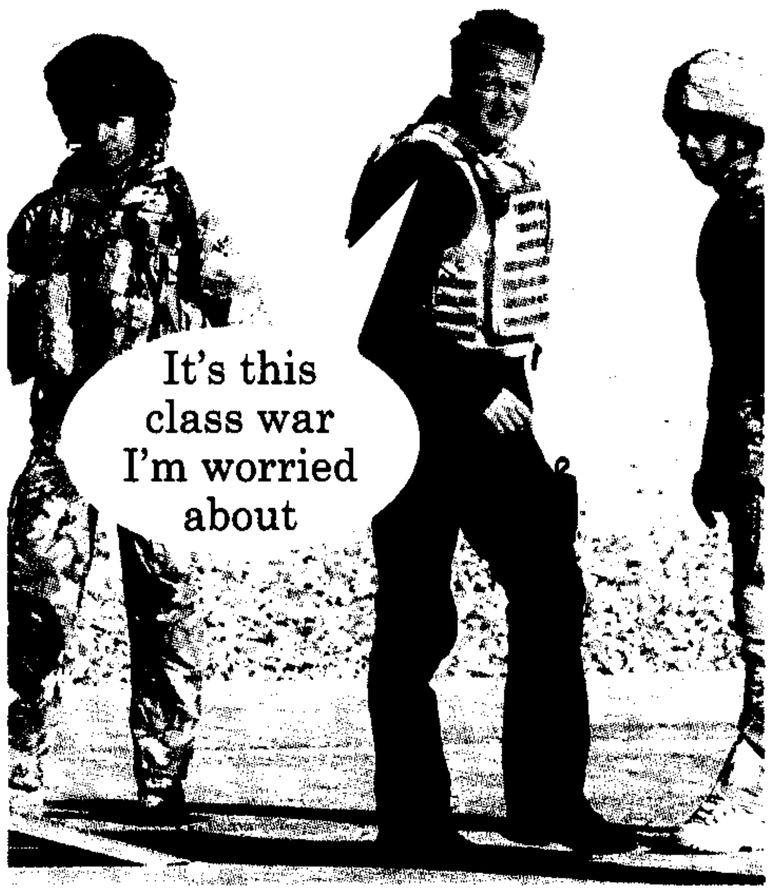
CAMERON ON THE FRONT LINE



DAVID CAMERON was in downtown Lashkar Gah in Afghanistan last week with his anointed defence secretary Liam Fox.

They were there to survey the scene, or more to the point, according to sources, "to find out whether the upcoming season of mayhem and bloodshed will be over before the UK election".

Dave and Liam are forming their own "war cabinet" and the unofficial *consigliere,* and liaison officer with the military world, is the newly elevated political editor of the *Sun,* Thomas Newton-Dunn. After a pow-wow with Cameron, Newton-Dunn confided his recent discussion of Dave's military experience: "Really it came down to his time in the Eton Rifles." After some deliberation, the embryonic war cabinet ordered: "Play down the Eton Rifles."

FRIENDS of Commons Speaker John Bercow insist that Tory whips will never endorse an attempt by a Tory backbencher to topple him from the Speakership. But are they sure?

At the Tory whips' annual pre-Christmas dinner, they held their customary charming alternative to a Parliamentary awards ceremony. This year's "Parliamentary Prick of the Year" was awarded (in his absence) to none other than... Mr Speaker Bercow.

See? They really do hold him in high esteem.

PREDICTION OF THE YEAR

"I came to Dubai to find out if it really is all it's cracked up to be, and the answer – if you like sun and fun, glitz and glamour – is a resounding 'yes'. As for the credit crunch, everyone I have met here says the same thing: Dubai won't just survive, it will thrive."

– Piers Morgan on Dubai, ITV1, January 2009

WHILE Annunziata Rees-Mogg, dull Tory candidate for Somerton and Frome, was having her profile boosted by a dubious story about Demotic Dave asking her to de-posh herself into common "Nancy Mogg" last week, her gaffe-prone brother Jacob's push to become MP for neighbouring Somerset North East, held by Labour with a majority of 1,839, wasn't going smoothly.

Both young Moggs have been bigged up in the *Times* by their daddy, William Rees-Smug, the rag's former editor: "Big guns wheeled out for battle of the marginals," he thunders. "I do not pretend to be impartial about the campaigns being fought by my children: they are working harder than I ever had to."

David Cameron qualifies as a big gun all right, but whenever he's in the area he always seems to have something to do other than lend a hand to fellow old Etonian Jacob, who has suffered a number of self-inflicted wounds this year, most notably being caught plagiarising material for his newsletter from the pages of the *Sun*. When Cameron was last in Somerset North East, it was to introduce Fabian Richter as the PPC for neighbouring Bath.

"Labour seems almost to have given up on the rural parts of the West Country, with a shortage of funds and active supporters," writes Rees-Smug Snr. Perhaps Labour thinks that with PPCs such Jacob and Annunziata standing for the Tories, who needs funds and supporters?

"SHE got through 27 secretaries in TWO years and reduced staff to tears every day. Meet Labour's ambassador for women at work."

Thus the *Daily Mail*'s headline last Saturday on a two-page feature about Glenda Stone, the "boss from hell" whose scary management style was revealed at an employment tribunal last week.

"The *Mail* has spoken to many of Dr Stone's ex-employees," it reported, "who have spoken of a 'climate of fear' in which they were repeatedly shouted at, undermined and bullied."

Did Paul Dacre, who was editing the paper that day, feel a flicker of recognition? One of the best-kept secrets at Associated Newspapers is what happened two years ago when Dacre berated one of his secretaries as "a fucking cunt". She walked out at once and consulted a solicitor. Horrified at the prospect of having the editor's own scary management style made public, the company offered compensation: in return for a legal undertaking to keep quiet, she received a cheque for £380,000.

● *More on Glenda Stone, p6.*

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£20m Amount British public donated to Children in Need this year

£850,000m Amount British public have donated to bankers in need so far

"Is the red face due to global warming or embarrassment?"

Street Of Shame

EXPLAINING why he is moving out of the *Telegraph*'s three-year-old office in Victoria to head up the mysterious "Euston Project" – a £10m bells-and-whistles digital operation the rest of the world is too fuddy-duddy to understand – editor-in-chief Will Lewis said it was essential in order to "develop new potential ways to raise money to ensure we can continue to invest in brilliant journalism."

And how! The most-viewed stories on the *Telegraph* website on 1 December? "1. Obese air passenger in economy seat has picture taken. 2. Russian bride's revealing wedding dress is web sensation. 3. Ex-Miss Argentina dies after buttock surgery. 4. Tiger Woods crash jokes: the best on the web. 5. *The Karate Kid* remake: first pictures."

Bill Deedes would be so proud!

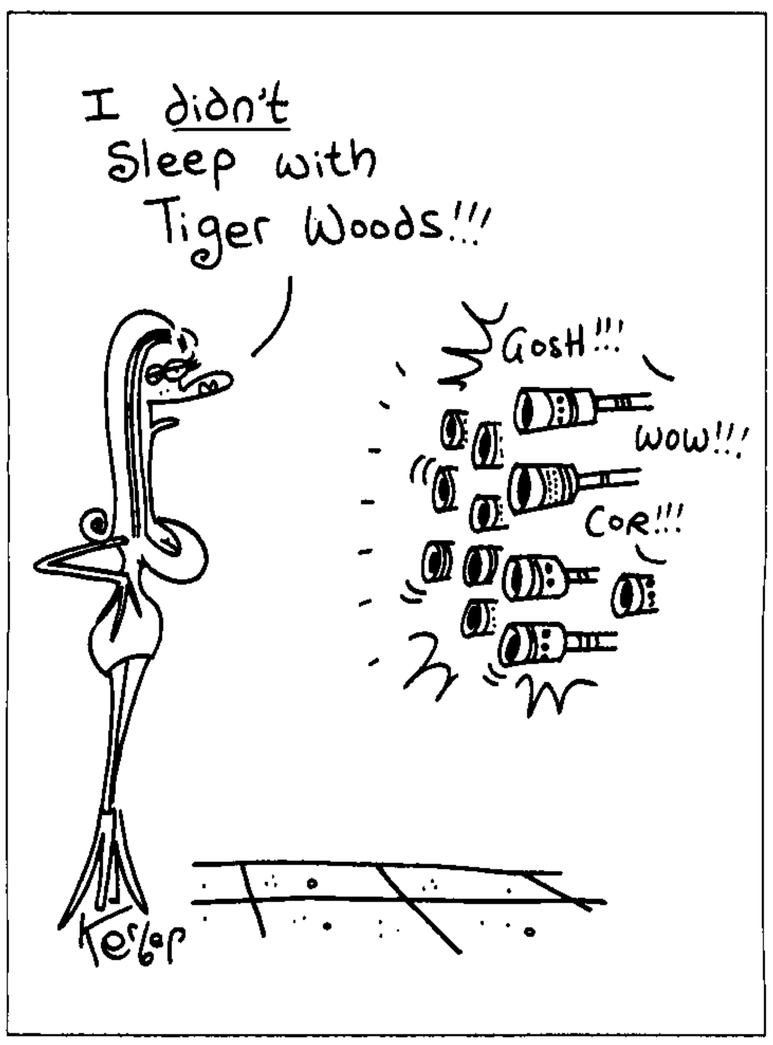
Meanwhile, will new *Telegraph* editor Tony Gallagher seize the chance to get rid of certain pisspoor overpaid hacks who were hired mainly because they were Will's cronies?

Probably not, according to other *Telegraph* executives. So hacks on the Sunday paper will still groan at the clueless Tweeting of new business editor Kamal Ahmed; and hacks on the daily will still seethe at the continuing employment of Jasper Gerard, who was rescued by thirsty Will after being dropped from the *Observer*. They'd seethe even more if they knew how much the feckless Gerard is paid for his column: £120,000 a year.

THIS WEEK saw the beginning of "*Avatar* Week" in the *Sun*, which promised readers: "Cinema will never be the same again as the most expensive movie ever made takes the greatest technological leap forward since colour pictures."

Lucky readers will have the chance to win tickets to the premiere, get free goodies and read all about the 3-D tricks that made the film possible (two full pages in the first day alone), as well as, er, actually going to see the film: "Now you too can see the future of cinema. *Avatar* opens in cinemas on December 17."

The prospect of an entire week of thinly veiled puff for a tedious Christmas blockbuster is surely unconnected with the fact that the film is being distributed by Fox, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which also happens to own the *Sun*.



HOW "JOURNALISM" WORKS

FORGET the divorce from Peter Andre – last week saw a much more significant and messy separation for Katie Price, aka Jordan, as she walked away from her long-term relationship with multimillionaire pornographer and publisher Richard Desmond.

"Britain's most talked-about star Katie Price speaks only to *Hello!* about her new start," bellows the cover of the current edition the celeb-mag. *Hello!* is, of course, the arch-rival of Desmond's *OK!*, which failed to offer enough to the, er, "model and businesswoman" to persuade her to renew her contract as agony aunt and permanent cover fixture beyond the end of November.

"I'm into a different league," she obligingly told *Hello!* "2010 is definitely going to be a very interesting, very successful, very strong year for me…"

"A more reflective, grounded Katie has emerged from the jungle," the mag simpered back, "focusing on fresh goals and values, re-evaluating the publicity that's been her lifeblood."

She's not the only one. "Greedy Jordan Was Massive Mistake," roared the front page of Desmond's *Daily Star* on Friday. The story inside referred to the reported £350,000 paid to her by ITV for her aborted appearance on *I'm a Celebrity*, but it left readers in no doubt as to how others who have splashed their cash on the silicone-enriched slapper – Desmond would regularly fly her to engagements in his private jet and escort her to charity events – feel.

Desmond, it would appear, is now firmly in Team Pete. But Price's ungratefulness is not his only reason for throwing his titles' support behind her former husband. "We have received a legal complaint from solicitors acting for Peter Andre," the *Star*'s legal department warned all hacks in a memo on 2 December. "The solicitors state that it is untrue that their client and his ex-wife have decided to put aside their differences and are seeking to revive their previous relationship in time for Christmas to re-ignite their multi-million-pound brand… If this article (or any part/s thereof) are on any of your websites or is available to any third party through your systems, please could you ensure that it is removed forthwith. The allegations should not be repeated."

Rather than an apology, however, Andre's lawyers got a front-page splash ("Exclusive – Pete: I'll Never Take Kate Back") and a triple-whammy inside. Firstly, "a source from Peter's camp told us: 'If you knew everything that has happened over the past year, you'd understand why it's very offensive for people to even ask him if they're going to get back together'"; secondly it was revealed that "Jordan begged to see a shrink after she quit *I'm a Celebrity* because the show left her so 'messed up'"; and thirdly, six unflattering photographs demonstrated "the sorry state Jordan is in".

This time, it's war.

THE sight of Richard "Dirty" Desmond in Wapping last week set a few tongues wagging. Just a few days earlier, weirdo News International boss Rebekah Brooks had visited Desmond at his own HQ in Lower Thames Street. What can they be up to?

It seems they have been discussing a marriage made in heaven – a tie-up between Dirty Des and the Dirty Digger, under which the *Express* titles would be printed on the Murdoch presses. This makes good business sense and would allow Desmond to sell his West Ferry printing site for redevelopment. It also explains why the NI papers have been trying so hard to avoid offending him lately.

Meanwhile, Desmond has been giving a conducted tour of his HQ to another surprising visitor – Geordie Greig, pukka editor of the London *Evening Standard*. Could it be that Dirty Des hopes to lure the *Standard* away from its present landlord (and minority shareholder), Lord Rothermere, and on to his roster of tenants at Lower Thames Street?

Standard hacks are horrified at the thought of moving into Dirty Des's rat-infested premises. But many of them will probably have lost their jobs by then anyway. The consequences of continual culls in the already slender news team are already wince-makingly apparent. Last Tuesday's first edition had the front-page splash: "Schools failing 30,000 children." By the time of the West End final edition, this had become: "Schools failing 50,000 children" – up by 20,000 in a mere five hours!

THE *Media Guardian* website is usually eager to report even the most minor job changes in the Street of Shame, but it was curiously circumspect about the recent defenestration of *Times* media editor Dan Sabbagh and made absolutely no mention of his replacement by thrusting twentysomething Alexi Mostrous – as reported in the last *Eye*.

Could this have anything to do with the fact that Mostrous is a close friend of *Grauniad* hackette Isabella Mackie and is also chummy with her father, *Grauniad* editor Alan Rusbridger? It surely can!

ONE YEAR on from the *Guardian*'s £8m move to its shiny new office in King's Cross, how are things working out in the new world of "breakout areas", "non-bookable think-pods" and "culture hubs"?

"The top brass keep getting together in one of those big glass goldfish-bowl meeting rooms in full view of all us plebs," a hack tells the *Eye*. "You can see them all sitting around staring at the big TV screen on the end wall which invariably has a picture of a graph with a big arrow pointing downward and a title at the top in the vein of 'Everything is really shit. So shit you would not believe it. Honestly.' You'd think they'd have the decency to do it behind closed doors but I suspect it's part of their plan to scare as many people into taking voluntary redundancy as possible."

Editor Alan Rusbridger expects up to 10 percent of his editorial staff to volunteer to walk the plank to help with the £36.8m operating loss he and his colleagues ran up last year. The commercial staff who are to be dispensed with will be informed this week – not quite the Christmas Eve foreseen by the *Grauniad*'s former drama critic Philip Hope-Wallace when he warned hacks to "never work for a liberal newspaper", but not far off.

LAST month an employment tribunal awarded Matt Driscoll, a former reporter on the *News of the World*, £793,000 for having been forced out of his job by "a consistent pattern of bullying behaviour" led by then editor Andy Coulson.

Thrilled at having uncovered yet more nefarious activities on the watch of his bête noire, now the Tories' chief spin-doctor, *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger rushed to Twitter. "Good job not A Campbell, or it wd be a story," he tweeted on 24 November. Two days later he returned in even higher dudgeon to the topic of "The story the British press didn't want to cover", pointing his 7,735 followers to his media columnist Roy Greenslade's claim that there was a "conspiracy of silence" on the topic.

Thank goodness for the *Guardian*, then. Its fearless coverage came a mere 17 months after the *Eye* first reported Driscoll's claims of bullying by Coulson and his cronies, in issue 1212 in June 2008.

Corrination street star

Maggie Jones dies aged 75

BBC News website

"I'm going to have to start charging you to hear the latest gossip"

THE Street of Shame gave full and gleeful coverage last week to the case of Glenda Stone, the boss of a recruitment company who was found by an employment tribunal to have bullied many of her workers, particularly women.

The *Daily Telegraph*'s excitement was mostly visual: it ran a huge photo of the pouting blonde on the front page and another huge photo inside, which must have gladdened the heart of Sir Herbert Gussett. For the *Times*, however, the story's appeal lay in the irony that this bullying boss, one of whose female staff was so intimidated she developed "a nervous twitch" at the sight of her, had chaired a government task force "to promote and encourage women in business" and sat on a small business panel advising Lord Mandelson on women's enterprise.

No mention, however, of an irony rather closer to home. Through her recruitment firm, Aurora, Stone also compiles the list of the "Top 50 Companies Where Women Want to Work" which appears every October as a supplement in, er, the *Times*.

As we revealed two months ago (*Eye* 1246), this is a ludicrous but lucrative wheeze. When not compiling the *Times* list, Aurora's main business is the website wheretowork.com, which offers recruitment advertising and "employer branding" to corporate clients for an annual fee of £12,000. To appear on wheretowork a company must have at least 1,000 UK employees – the very same criterion that applies to the *Times* list. And, surprise surprise, Aurora clients who enter the supposedly impartial competition that Glenda judges and administers for the *Times* always win. Just as well, given that she depends on these entrants for her company's livelihood.

The *Times* seemed untroubled by this obvious conflict of interest when we pointed it out. But can even a Murdoch paper have the chutzpah to let the "dictatorial and intimidating" Glenda continue dishing out its awards for female-friendly employers?

A DISTRESSING start to the festive season at the *Observer*. Its feature about the Katine project in Uganda, the beneficiary of the *Guardian* and *Observer* Christmas appeals, aroused feelings in some readers that were far from charitable.

"You want me as a gay man to contribute to this country," one wrote in the online comments. "I don't think so – why don't you ask the evil right-wing Christians that control the country to hand over their money?" Another wrote that the Ugandan government had "more than enough money" to feed and educate its people but preferred to squander it on armaments, safe in the knowledge that foreign charities would make up the shortfall.

Hence the urgent memo to sub-editors at both papers last week from the production/IT department: "Can we please ensure that any Christmas appeal web copy has comments switched off from now on so that we can avoid comments similar to some of those?"

WHILE Rupert Murdoch issues grave threats about the menace of Google – which has driven him to start charging for his online newspapers – the message does not seem to have filtered down to his hacks at Wapping.

The *Sun*'s website announces proudly at the top of the homepage that its archive search is, er, "enhanced by Google".

"PIXIE Lott revealed her top tracks for a relaunch of web phenomenon MySpace today," enthused the *Sun*'s showbiz columnist Gordon Smart on 3 December. "It is reinventing itself as a pure music site with lots of free music and video."

Sadly, Smart could find no space in his column to record that MySpace is owned by Rupert Murdoch, proprietor of the *Sun*, or that this latest relaunch is a last-ditch attempt by the Jack Woolley of the internet to claw back some of the $580m he unwisely splashed on the site in 2005.

COLIN GIBSON, spin-doctor at the England and Wales Cricket Board, was no doubt delighted to learn from Charlie Sale's Sports Agenda column in the *Daily Mail* last week that he "has emerged as favourite to take charge of a revamped International Cricket Council media operation".

He must have been even more delighted to see Sale promoting his credentials for the job: "Gibson, who played a significant role in the successful World Twenty20 in England last summer, would be a much-needed addition to the staff ahead of the next Twenty20 tournament in the West Indies."

One fact was omitted. Gibson, the beneficiary of Sale's puffery, is an old friend – and a former sports editor at the *Mail*.

A YEAR has passed since we caught former England rugby international Will Greenwood using his *Telegraph* sports column to promote the Heineken Cup and its sponsors ("Fill the ice-bath with Heineken", etc) without mentioning that he was paid a handsome retainer by Heineken to act as one of its "ambassadors".

Somebody on the sports desk might want to have a word, for he's up to his old tricks again. "Saturday's MasterCard Trophy match against New Zealand is set up to be a classic," he drooled last weekend, licking his lips at the prospect of an encounter between the Barbarians and the All Blacks. All most gratifying for Mastercard, which was given a further mention in the same piece. And who had Mastercard hired to help publicise its sponsorship? Will Greenwood.

JOINED-UP JOURNALISM

● "Gold dips amid warning over price correction… Gold lost all its weekly gains yesterday, sharply down from a record high hit on Thursday."

– Financial Times, 5 December, p23.

● "The price of bullion pushed above $1,200 an ounce to reach a record high as the metal's momentum shows few signs of abating."

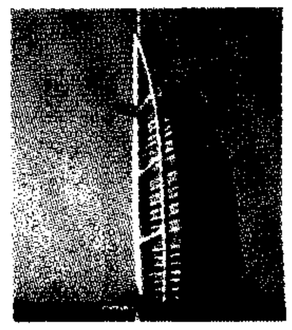
– Financial Times, 5 December, p24.

THE *Sunday Mirror* splashed "exclusive" banners all over its coverage of the conviction of Amanda Knox for the murder of Meredith Kercher, but the most startling insight was saved for the official Twitter feed of showbiz columnist Dean Piper.

"Lyle – brother of Meredith Kercher – is pretty damn hot," he informed the world on 5 December. Since Piper's column features "The Hottest Stories – The Hottest Celebs", expect pap shots of Mr Kercher grieving the night away before the year is out.

HACKWATCH

The Sandy Times



THE *Sunday Times* couldn't resist revelling in the economic woes of a country that is even more debt-ridden than the UK – Dubai. Under the headline "Just Deserts", John Arlidge wrote a 2,000-word cautionary tale about the perils of hubris.

"The country is paying the price for embarking on the world's biggest spending spree – with other people's money." According to Arlidge, analysts had warned from the start that the Gulf state's expansion was fraught with problems. "The country's economic leadership has also been exposed as inexperienced," he continued. "The aggressive overseas expansion by Dubai World's boss, Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, has proved disastrous."

If any British hack ought to know about Dubai it is Arlidge, who has been there on numerous occasions in the last few years. Alas, the hot sun and lavish hospitality of his hosts must have sent him into a swoon.

His first visit on the *ST*'s behalf was in November 2003. "Call it cash 'n' flash vanity, call it unsurpassed ambition," he enthused, "but you've got to hand it to the movers and sheikhas. Nobody does imagination better than Dubai." Three years later he returned for an article headed, "Dubai's building frenzy lays foundation for global power", and there was more of the same in April 2007 ("Selling Dubai's sky-high vision").

What of the "disastrous" plans of Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem? There was no hint of concern when Arlidge interviewed him in November that year. "[He] has risen through the ranks to become the right-hand man of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai, who is transforming the dusty desert outpost into the Singapore of the Middle East," Arlidge gushed. His brand of capitalism was "fostering a Middle Eastern version of the American dream."

Arlidge was back in the Gulf in July 2008 to produce a special 12-page pullout on Dubai for the *Sunday Times*, which urged investors to "follow the money as it builds the future". And what a future! As another puff-piece in Arlidge's supplement stated: "In the same way that Dubai is now home to the world's tallest building, the still-growing Burj Dubai tower, the city is not going to be content with just being merely a regional financial hub: it has plans to be one of the international financial powerhouses of the 21st century."

Even when financiers were beginning to wise up in December 2008, yet another Arlidge feature ("Market built on more than sand") reassured readers that all would be well. "Dubai has always been a bold market. Bolstered by local wealth, international expertise and government support, it will continue to generate interest."

In the last fortnight that interest has waned dramatically, hence Arlidge's reverse ferret. Now he warns of "other secrets lurking in the desert sands. Dubai's rulers are notorious for covering up problems, aided by state-controlled media, which act as cheerleaders for the emirate." How unlike our own dear hacks and the papers that publish them!

JUST FANCY THAT!

"QATAR rises above Gulf crisis with high hopes for UK property market," reported the City pages of the *Times* on 3 December as it found positive news in one corner of the Middle East despite the debt crisis in Dubai.

What a happy coincidence that the same day's *Times* also published a four-page advertorial supplement about the joys of Qatar, which gushed: "Ambitious Gulf state is changing gear to speed up economic growth."

GOLDSMITH & SON

"MY non-domicile status is a reflection of my father's [Sir Jimmy Goldsmith's] international status, but despite this, I have always chosen of my own volition to be tax resident in the UK," bleated Zac Goldsmith when his overseas tax status was revealed. The truth is quite the reverse.

Tax residence is *not* a matter of choice: it is based on physical presence in the country (generally if you're here more than 90 days in a year, you're tax resident). Domicile status, by contrast, is not imposed, as Goldsmith claimed, and is very much a matter of choice.

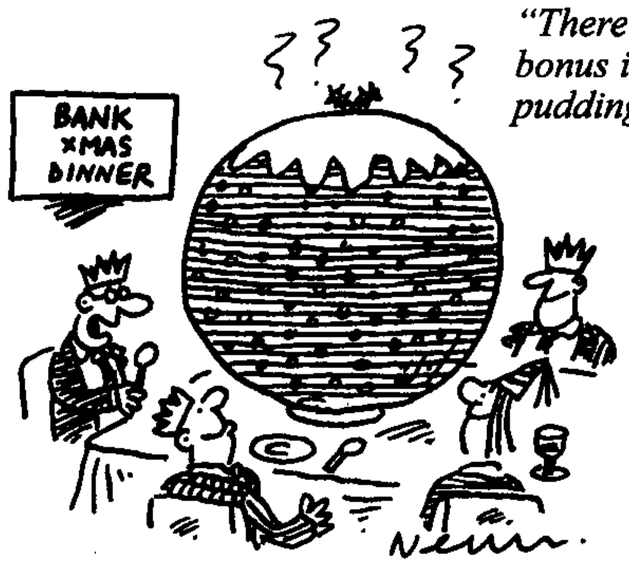
A foreign domicile inherited from a non-dom father, enabling tax to be dodged on foreign income, can be relinquished at any time from the age of 16 by adopting the UK as a "permanent home". That Goldsmith has not done this until now might alarm the voters of Richmond Park, a seat for which he has been campaigning while holding a deeper allegiance to, er, France.

Whether the taxman accepts Goldsmith's version is no foregone conclusion. HM Revenue & Customs' official guidance advises non-doms who inherited their status from their fathers: "You have bought a home and married [as Goldsmith has] and you have made the UK your permanent home [he has always lived in the UK] which you do not intend to leave... By deciding to stay in the UK permanently or indefinitely you have established a domicile of choice in the UK."

To avoid a big bill for back-taxes Goldsmith will need to satisfy the Revenue that right up until his latest announcement he always intended to move to France at some particular point in the future. Did he confess this to the Richmond Park Tories when they selected him?

PS: This fairly significant embarrassment for the Tory party was widely reported – but not in the *Mail* papers where it received only the briefest diary mention. Could this be because proprietor Lord Rothermere also enjoys non-dom status (see *Eyes* 1232 and 1233)? He acquired it exactly as Goldsmith did and also has an ultimate allegiance to France (*Eye* 1234). Unlike the true-blue politician, however, the true-blue proprietor doesn't feel the patriotic need to commit to Britain and relinquish his multi-million pound tax advantage.

PPS: One man who was keen to bring up the subject was Gordon Brown. At prime minister's questions last week he taunted David Cameron with references to "him and Mr Goldsmith" and the Tories' "global tax policy to help non-domiciled candidates". Could this be the same Gordon Brown who in opposition promised to overturn the non-dom anomaly but did nothing for a decade, as non-doms filled his party's coffers and took Labour seats in the Lords, before in 2008 entrenching the status for generations with a pin-prick £25,000 annual levy – to the glee of all those wealthy non-doms? It certainly could.



"There's a bonus in the pudding"

CALLED TO ORDURE

GORDON BROWN, telling the Commons that more military personnel would be sent to Afghanistan, mentioned our special forces (SAS, SBS etc).

"I believe that the British people have a right to know and deserve the assurance," said Brown, "that our highly professional, widely respected and extraordinarily brave special forces are playing their full role not only in force protection but in taking the fight directly to the Taliban, working in theatre alongside our regular forces. I want the whole country to pay tribute to their work."

Fine words. But should he have spoken them so publicly? Ministers have long been wary about saying when the special forces are engaged in a war zone. There is greater military tactical advantage to be had in developing an air of mystique around them. Special forces often work in enemy territory, under cover. We don't want them to be hunted down.

The next day in the Chamber, Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) suggested that Brown may have broken one of his own Government's "D notices" – confidential Whitehall memos which ask the media not to report certain matters of national security. Mackinlay, in a question to foreign secretary David Miliband about counter-insurgency, said: "Can he tell the House whether a D notice was in existence prior to yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister of the numbers of special forces deployed to the region, and if so, why it was in existence before that statement and why it was no longer necessary after it?"

Mackinlay takes the view that D notices should be issued only when necessary. He reckons the press are less likely to take any notice of them if they think ministers are going to blab anyway. It would certainly by reprehensible if D notices were issued simply to stop the media stealing some PR thunder from a Prime Minister who is looking for headlines.

A hesitant Miliband told Mackinlay that this was "tangled territory" and that he would write to him privately. He said he would also make sure that there was "a full understanding in all parts of the House" (ie, he would talk to Opposition frontbenchers about the matter but it would be on Privy Council terms that should not be leaked to the press).

There was more of the same over in the House of Lords, where the Establishment was effecting a European stitch-up. The House's committee of selection, run by the whips, announced membership of the European Union Committee, which scrutinises our country's relationship with Brussels.

Those committee members in full: Labour's Lady Cohen (ex-civil servant and BBC governor), Lord Paul (vigorous expenses claimer), Lord Richard (ex-Brussels gravy-trainer), Lord Sewel (ex-Fisheries minister) and Lady Symons (ex-Foreign Office minister); the Tories' Lord Bowness (EU human-rights waffler), Lord Freeman (soapy ex-transport minister), Lord Plumb (bumbling ex-MEP), Lord Powell (notorious foreign-affairs schmoozer who used to be Mrs T's bag carrier) and Lord Trimble (ex-Ulster Unionist leader); the Lib Dems' Lord Dykes (ex-MP best known as an ardent Europhile), Lord Roper (onetime Fabian Society worthy), Lady Sharp (co-author of that publishing humdinger *Technology Policy in the European Union*) and Lord Teverson (ex-MEP); Crossbenchers Lord Dear (ex-top copper), Lord Hannay (pro-European ex-diplomat), Lord Kerr (ditto, but not quite as irritating as the oleaginous Hannay).

Lord Pearson, newly elected leader of Ukip, was perhaps understandably appalled and had a go at Lord Brabazon, the "chairman of committees" (officer in charge of stitch-ups). Pearson asked Brabazon: "Can he name any members of the proposed committee who share the views of the majority of our people? I can identify only one noble Lord who could be described as vaguely Eurosceptic."

But does any of this matter? Perhaps less than one might hope. The House of Lords European Union Committee's findings have long been almost completely ignored by Brussels and the Foreign Office. Hardly surprising, really, when it is so stuffed with yes-peers.

Pearson wondered if there was a single finding of the committee had led to direct action. Lord Vinson (Con) replied that it had once "managed to alter the radio frequencies of certain telephones". And, er, that was about it.

'Gavel Basher'

MYNERS STRIKE

LIKE any good comedian, Treasury minister Lord Myners knows his audience.

A fortnight ago, at a City seminar of the Council of Christians and Jews, he was preaching the importance of biblical values and complaining that "the City has been opaque, shrouded in mystery, revealing itself only to announce enormous profits or to deal with corporate or customer scandals". Myners was especially disappointed at "opposition to change from those who have been rewarded so generously in the past" and "astonished by the thickness of the skins of some with whom I speak in trading rooms and executive suites'. And in recent days he has enthusiastically joined in the public banker-bashing over bonuses at RBS.

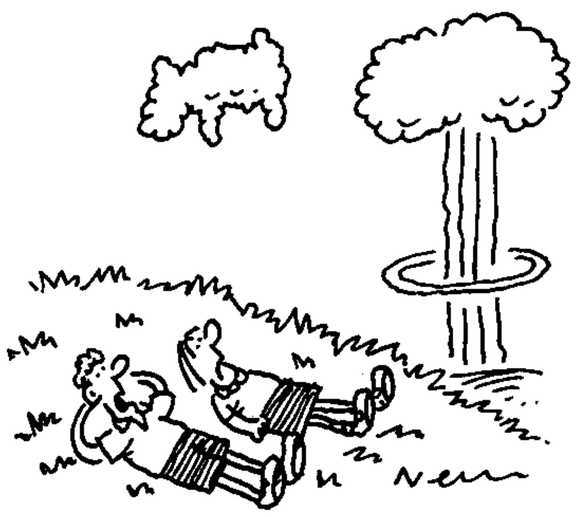
Oddly enough in October, just one month before the seminar, Myners addressed the recalcitrant bankers themselves at the Worshipful Company of International Bankers' annual dinner. The message was slightly different. "The pursuit of personal profits did not lead to the financial crisis," he claimed then. No, it wasn't bankers chasing greater bonuses by creating and flogging as much toxic debt as possible that wrecked the system, although "remuneration polices did encourage excessive risk appetites".

And, far from resisting reform, the bankers earned a qualified pat on the back from the minister. "I commend the industry for taking the first steps, and urge them to continue the journey," he concluded.

THE SAME Lord Myners was thus happy to accept the prescription for bank "governance" from City veteran David Walker, whose long-awaited report was every bit as insipid as *Eye* readers would have expected (see *Eye* 1230): lukewarm proposals to amend obscure corporate governance codes and a soon-to-be-forgotten plea for non-executive directors to get more involved.

In shelving plans to identify the banks' big earners, Walker went against Myners, who is on record as being in favour of naming names. But, unlike other recommendations that the government doesn't like and can easily be rejected, banker-friendly ones have to be accepted. Myners swiftly declared himself "comfortable" with Walker's cop-out. A cynic might think the game is simply to sound tough on bankers for public consumption while doing as little as possible.

Walker is a former chairman of Morgan Stanley International but gets very cross if anybody suggests he isn't independent. Yet he remains on the payroll as an adviser to the firm. Thanks to Walker, they can carry on trousering their millions in blissful anonymity.



"That cloud looks like a doggy – and that cloud looks like Iran's expanded its nuclear capabilities"

IRAQ INQUIRY: DIDN'T THEY DO WELL?

WHILE the Chilcot Inquiry was set up because something went seriously wrong with the war in Iraq, some prominent witnesses seem to have done rather well out of the whole affair.

Jeremy Greenstock, for instance, agonised over the war and tried to put some distance between him and its worst aspects. The second in command of the Coalition Provisional Authority from 2003 to 2004, Greenstock in 2005 became an adviser to BP, which recently won its first oil contract in Iraq.

He is also a director of De La Rue, which was paid $120m of Iraq's oil money to print the new currency in 2003. There are complaints about British failure to plan for postwar Iraq, but De La Rue actually lobbied the Foreign Office for this work back in March 2003, before the war even began. Papers released under Freedom of Information show that the firm "made a sales pitch" for the massive job – the bank-notes were shipped from Basingstoke to Baghdad in 27 chartered 747 jets – two days before the bombs began to fall.

Then there is **David Manning**, who gave evidence on Monday. Blair's former special adviser is now a board member of arms firm Lockheed UK. Lockheed profited by selling many of the weapons used in the war and issued a special brochure about "The success of Operation Iraqi Freedom", boasting how "Lockheed Martin was at the forefront, contributing weapon systems, advanced technology, and system integration expertise".

Former Chief of Defence Staff **Lord Boyce**, who gave evidence on Thursday, is now an adviser to America's Computer Sciences Corporation, which makes money sending technicians and office staff to work in Iraq on contract to the US Army.

WHILE the Inquiry members are hardly probing, new information has appeared.

Inquiry witnesses have confirmed that Britain was involved in Iraq war planning with the US in 2002, when the government was publicly claiming that no decisions had been made. This was reinforced by leaked military "lessons learned" papers obtained by Andrew Gilligan for the *Telegraph*.

Private Eye readers may also remember that in 2007 this magazine described the PowerPoint slides that US General Tommy Franks showed to George W Bush in 2002 outlining their war plans and naming British forces, including the SAS and various RAF squadrons.

The Chilcot Inquiry also heard former Foreign Office defence chief Sir William Ehrman say: "We did, in the very final days before military action, receive some [intelligence] on CBW [chemical and biological weapons] use that it was disassembled, that you might not have the munitions to deliver it." It seems likely he refers to the Shipster mission, discussed in *Private Eye* last November, in which British official Michael Shipster was told by Iraqi intelligence officer Tahir Habbush, who was acting as an agent for the West, that there were no WMD. The Inquiry's version, that the WMD were "disassembled", seems like very diplomatic language. They were not "disassembled" in the sense of waiting in kit form to be put together. They were "disassembled" in the sense of the whole programme having been taken apart some years before.

The Inquiry could investigate this by inviting Sir Richard Dearlove or any of the agents involved in the mission to give evidence, but so far it does not seem inclined to do so.

HOW THE LEFT WORKS: CLOAK AND STAGGERS

INTERVIEWED by an uncritical media hack from the *Independent*, Jason Cowley claimed that the *New Statesman* under his editorship would be "true to our political heritage, indeed our radical heritage", although the tone would be "more plural, more sceptical and more nuanced".

Civilised nuance and urbane scepticism are the last things the *Staggers*' wretched writers are experiencing as they struggle to survive a magazine whose viciousness grows as its circulation plummets. While Cowley was charming the *Indie,* Barbara Gunnell, the *Statesman*'s respected deputy editor, secured five-figure damages for unfair dismissal at an employment tribunal after Cowley had targeted her when he took over. Gunnell, along with acting editor Sue Matthias, had kept the magazine going before Cowley arrived in the autumn of 2008. But because she wasn't his appointee, she had to go. Matthias and Alice O'Keefe, the arts editor, followed soon afterwards.

Meanwhile, alongside Gunnell at the tribunal was Ian Irvine, the *Statesman*'s equally well-respected literary editor, whom Cowley made redundant because he claimed his job was no longer needed, and in any case Irvine's books pages were "too high-cultural and bourgeois".

Cowley draws a salary of £150,000 for running a tiny organisation, so he isn't really in a position to pose as a working-class hero and enemy of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, he seemed to think that a magazine whose heritage in the 20th century included publishing highbrow writers from Cyril Connolly to Martin Amis should now be the leftie equivalent of the *Sunday Express*. Faced with having his ideas exposed in open court, he folded and settled Irvine's unfair dismissal claim.

Before Gunnell and Irvine, Cowley had to pay Martin Bright handsome compensation after he forced him out. As the *Eye* reported, Charlie Whelan, Gordon Brown's thug, had boasted in public at a press awards ceremony how he was going to get the *Statesman* to fire Bright for daring to make an unflattering documentary about Ken Livingstone. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cowley and Mike Danson, the web entrepreneur who owns the *Statesman*, refuse to recognise the NUJ.

No one on the left seems to care. Compass, the supposedly left-wing Labour pressure group, hosts joint events with the *Staggers*, and Jeremy Dear, the NUJ's leader, writes for a magazine that refuses to recognise his union. Most hypocritical of all is the behaviour of the *Statesman*'s elderly radical firebrands. Earlier this year, Caroline Palmer, the chief sub and NUJ rep, decided to organise a public campaign to embarrass the *Statesman* into doing the right thing. Peter Wilby, a former editor and leftie media commentator, refused to sign up, so she phoned John Pilger, that fearless foe of oppression. When she asked him to fight against his management, however, he too refused. "I thought he would be angry about the treatment of his colleagues. Instead he was terribly frosty and all but hung up on me," she said. She decided the *Statesman* was no longer worth saving and resigned as well.

NEWS FROM SANDY PLACES

GORDON BROWN'S recent announcement that a "further" 500 British troops will be sent to Helmand in support of the Great Obama Surge is somewhat disingenuous.

In fact the UK will not be sending an additional 500 troops, but will be sending a battalion that was deliberately withheld from deployment in October in order to give the PM the welcome opportunity to conjure up troops as if by magic, thus allowing him to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Obama when the call came.

Back in October Brown told the Commons that the UK would no longer undertake the commitment of supporting the Regional Battle Group (South) in Afghanistan; the RBG (S) was to be moved "with immediate effect" to Helmand province.

The battalion earmarked at the time for that support role was 1 Royal Welsh, which was withheld in the UK instead, much to the dismay of Lieutenant Colonel Nick Lock, its commanding officer. The Royal Welsh had just completed a year-long series of exercises, culminating in a Mission Rehearsal Exercise for immediate deployment. Being kept in the UK subjected the battalion to weeks of "skills fade", wasting the readiness that is intended to save lives once on the ground.

This is not the first time 1 Royal Welsh has had its flexibility tested by political expediency. In 2007 it was warned that it would be deployed to Afghanistan, again "with immediate effect". Halfway through crucial training troops were told they would be going to Basra in Iraq instead, with a different role in a totally different tactical environment. Then, while their commanding officer was in Basra assessing the coming deployment, they were told they would be going to Afghanistan after all.

In the end only one company of the battalion was sent to Afghanistan. When the soldiers arrived, none of their equipment was ready. It was sitting in containers in Camp Bastion – while they were deployed instead to Kandahar.

'Squarebasher'

Libel News

CONFIDENTIAL submissions to the Commons inquiry into libel law reveal that those champions of free speech at Carter-Fuck are making pots of money by, among other things, menacing the critics of radical Islam.

The Centre for Social Cohesion, which investigates white and Islamist far-right groups, has told John Whittingdale, inquiry chairman, how it had wanted to produce a factual guide to Muslim organisations. When it came to the Interpal charity, the think tank duly said it gave aid to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza strip, and then noted the following facts that were on record:

The US Treasury had alleged that Interpal had links to terrorism in 2003. In 2006, a BBC *Panorama* documentary had alleged it had links to Hamas, a designated terrorist group in the US and the European Union. Meanwhile Britain's Charity Commission had launched three investigations into whether Interpal had raised funds for Hamas (although the report stressed that the commission had found no evidence of wrongdoing on Interpal's part).

Because it was producing a guidebook, the Centre of Social Cohesion sent a proof to every organisation it named. Interpal turned to Carter-Fuck who warned that repetition of allegations in the public domain would result in an instant libel action. Even to say that Interpal was a "muslim" charity was false, the lawyers thundered.

In his submission to the MPs, Douglas Murray, director of the Centre for Social Cohesion, says the threat from Carter-Fuck stopped the report's publication. It was, he said, an "unacceptable restriction on freedom of speech" for lawyers to threaten small organisations with a "lawsuit and potential bankruptcy simply for reproducing information already reported in numerous reputable sources". An "unacceptable restriction on freedom of speech"? Whatever next from Carter-Fuck!

'Ratbiter'

School of Saatchi (BBC2)

EVER since it became apparent that the biggest ratings and publicity in modern television are available from reality and talent shows, the BBC has faced a quandary. Naturally, its channels wanted a slice of the action; but series in which ambitious young wannabes aim for a brief celebrity career by living for a month in a bungalow or belting out a bad cover version of a Robbie Williams song are hard to fit within the remit of public service television.

Accordingly – after *Fame Academy*, a short-lived and disastrous *Pop Idol* rip-off – the solution has been to aim for show-off shows which could in some way be sold as culturally improving.

So those Graham Norton series which set out to cast a Lloyd-Webber musical claim the justification of raising interest in theatre, while *Maestro* popularised classical music and even *Strictly Come Dancing* could boast of raising the profile of a genteel and neglected form of entertainment.

And now the wannabe format reaches high art or, anyway, modern art. **School of Saatchi** chooses six aspiring artists to compete for wall-space in Mr Nigella's exhibition at the Hermitage Museum and funding from the maker of Damien and Tracy to run a studio in London for three years or, as the voice-over puts it, "a passport into the charmed inner circle of the country's art-world."

In artistic terms the series is Warholian, in that it consists of an exact copy of images which already exist. The extent to which it borrows from past examples of the genre is dizzying. A panel of industry pundits divided between hard cops and soft cops – including Tracy from Margate herself, critic Matthew Collings and Mancunian art collector Frank Cohen – sets a series of challenges which allow them to choose a group who will be admitted to a London building rented by the show.

The opening episodes dourly reproduced every cliché from *The X Factor* – the sniggering parade of the applicants considered too weird or talentless for selection – and *The Apprentice*: the contestants arranged in a semi-circle at some budget-conscious UK location while they receive details of that week's challenge.

Admittedly there's one original aspect which makes this one of the most ludicrous hoots ever screened on TV. You remember those episodes of *The Apprentice* in which "Sir Alan is away on business" and so Nick and Margaret did the briefing? Well, this is all like that.

Saatchi, explains Hugh Bonneville on voice-over, is "deeply reclusive" and "so will not be appearing on camera". The great art collector won't even use the Osama Bin Laden solution of sending in audio-tapes from a remote cave and the producers don't have enough sense of humour to go for the Gerry Adams option – "The words of Charles Saatchi will be read by an actor" – and so, after the famous market-maker has been to see the competing pieces under cover of darkness, his opinions are passed on next day by a nervous-looking woman from his gallery.

Facing the drawback of never being able to show the main focus of the programme, the production team is also handicapped by post-Ross BBC nannying. When Tracy Emin gets agitated, she uses the word "flipping", which must have taken some retakes. And a nude model provided for a life-drawing class is ridiculously arranged with her legs held tight together and arms across her knockers to avoid upsetting anyone. Amazingly, the show is even frightened of art. Critic Matthew Collings asks all the contestants "but why is it art?" – a question he would never have raised in his coverage of the Turner Prize.

At intervals, the thought occurs that Saatchi regards the whole thing as an art-work, a post-modern exercise: Programme Without Title Character. Perhaps he plans to enter this for next year's Turner Prize as a video installation. Whatever, he has already won television's Turn-Off Prize for agreeing to take part (could his old mate Botney not have advised him against this folly?) to take part in these breathtakingly tedious and pretentious exercises?

'Remote Controller'

AROUND THE WORLD WITH DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: La Stampa and La Repubblica are newspapers published in which European country?
Contestant: Mexico.

AR: Which European country's name was literally intended to mean "The Way North"?
Contestant: America.

AR: Which southern European country was ruled by Antonio Salazar from 1932 to 1968?
Contestant (certain): Russia.

AR: What is the easternmost destination on the Trans-Siberian railway?
Contestant: Vienna.

AR: What "I" is a spa town in Yorkshire?
Contestant: Innsbruck.

Mastermind, BBC2

John Humphrys: Tobermory is the chief town of which Hebridean island?
Contestant: Sark.

"We constantly monitor your BBC transmissions, so naturally we thought this was how you dressed"

MEDIA NEWS

LINKS between the Dirty Digger and Tory MP John Whittingdale, who chairs the Commons media select committee, go well beyond newspapers and the Press Complaints Commission (see last *Eye*). Whitto also has a tender pastoral concern for Murdoch's broadcasting interests.

It dates back at least as far as 1996, when he resigned his job as a PPS because John Major insisted on keeping restrictions that stopped major newspaper proprietors (guess who) owning or controlling terrestrial TV channels. Whittingdale described his own government's proposals as "silly".

Since taking over as chairman of the select committee in 2005, he has appointed two particularly intriguing specialist advisers – the influential and supposedly independent experts, paid for by the taxpayer, who recommend names of witnesses, suggest lines of questioning for committee members, and draft large parts of the committee's reports.

The first was Ray Gallagher, who for many years was director of public affairs at Murdoch's BSkyB. More recently Whittingdale also recruited Martin Le Jeune, a free-market head-banger who makes Margaret Thatcher look positively Keynesian. Le Jeune runs a public affairs consultancy whose client list, according to its website, is topped by Sky. His last job before setting up the firm last year was head of public affairs at BSkyB.

Does this begin to look like a recurring theme, or even a conflict of interest? Not to Whitto. On 31 March this year, Le Jeune published a report through the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies on the future of the BBC. It called for a much smaller Beeb, showing lots of high-brow artsy stuff that no one would watch, leaving the field clear for his client and former employer to harvest disaffected viewers. The report was an embarrassment to Cameron's Tories, and disappeared without trace.

Just seven days later, Whittingdale's committee produced an influential report on the BBC's commercial activities. It attacked the BBC Trust and BBC Worldwide for being "less than transparent", condemned Worldwide's investment in UK production companies (while accepting that this "might be an important source of funding to keep companies afloat"), called for part of the licence fee to be siphoned off to Channel 4, and for BBC Worldwide's activities to be "reined back".

And who was the "independent" expert who was paid from the public purse to help Whittingdale compile this anti-BBC tirade? A small footnote at the bottom of page 3 expresses gratitude to "Martin Le Jeune, who acted as Specialist Adviser on this inquiry".

BIRTSPEAK 2.0

EXISTING MEETINGS:

Campaign Strategy & Dev Meeting - Owner: Learning. Frequency: Monthly

Execs Routine - Owner: Learning. Frequency: Weekly

Major Audience Proposition Review - Owner: Future Media & Technology. Frequency: every 5 weeks

Team Meetings and Scrums - Owner: FM&T and/or Multi-Platform Productions. Frequency: Weekly and/or Daily. Scrums led by the Scrum Master, Weekly Team Meetings led by the Product Owner…

PROPOSED NEW MEETINGS:

Monthly Portfolio Meeting - Review the entire portfolio/roadmap with all Execs: agree which projects go to next MAPR; next PFC; discuss resource issues that may affect multiple projects.

Pre-PFC Greenlight - MPP and FM&T ensure the Comm'g Pack is reviewed and greenlit from their perspective.

– Extracts from internal BBC presentation "Learning Campaigns MPP & FM&T Vision: An outline of both existing & proposed activities in the Commissioning & Production/Build Process of Multiplatform Learning Campaigns".

THE continuing failures of the BBC's phone and computer systems, outsourced to Siemens in a £2bn deal over 10 years, have finally led to almost total disaster.

In an attempt to stem the tide of constant failure, Siemens engineers installed a "patch" to repair some of the faults. Once installed, the repair itself failed and brought the whole system crashing down, leaving producers without phones or access to the computers on which scripts, cues, running orders and research material were stored.

An email to production teams on *Panorama* shows the extent of the panic: "We have been informed that there is a very serious danger that the BBC Network is going to collapse. Please print any scripts etc that you need. This is not a rehearsal."

In order to keep programmes on the air, useless Siemens phones were unplugged and replaced with old BBC handsets. Others improvised – Charlotte Green delivered a morning news bulletin via her own mobile when studio computers crashed.

A flurry of emails to staff followed, offering grovelling apologies. Head of News Helen Boaden said: "Thank you for your sterling efforts to keep programmes on air" and for "working around these completely unacceptable problems", adding that Siemens "are in no doubt as to how serious this incident is for our journalism teams."

The BBC confidently predicted in 2004 that the "landmark" Siemens deal would save the corporation £30m a year over the life of the contract. Given the extensive reintroduction of old systems that actually work, this seems unlikely. What is far more likely is that if the system crashes again, the deal may be cancelled at further cost to the licence-payer.

There is a precedent for this. The equally disastrous "property partnership" with Land Securities Trillium was unceremoniously scrapped back in 2005 when the "outsourced" business failed to save the BBC any money at all.

THE BBC's compliance system, reinforced after the Brand/Woss fiasco and headed by Paul Smith, who used to operate Gordon the Gopher, the puppet on Children's BBC, also collapsed – thanks again to Siemens.

The system demands that producers and editors fill in a lengthy electronic form for all programmes prior to transmission, listing any potential swearwords, images of violence, mentions of commercial brands etc. Once filled in, the forms are emailed to Ofcom, where they remain unread and are eventually deleted. Without a Compliance Form, a programme cannot be broadcast.

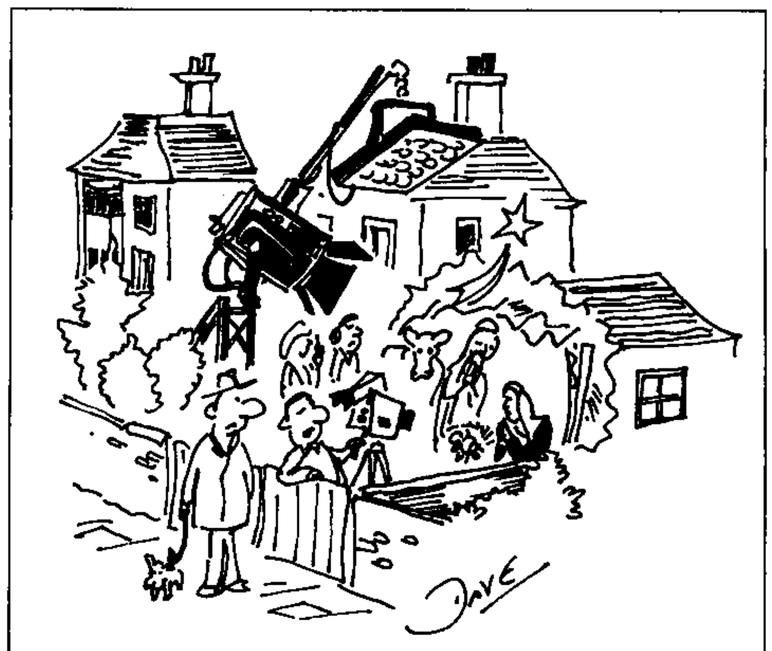
When the computer systems crashed, emergency measures were swiftly introduced to keep programmes on the air. They included advice that "all pre-recorded programmes (in-house and independent) must be listened to *in full* by both the producer *and* a senior editorial figure prior to transmission" and that "a conversation between producer and a senior editorial figure must take place".

This brilliant plan is in fact the old, pre-compliance system, which worked pretty well. Producers are hoping its temporary restoration may highlight the pointlessness of the modern, crash-prone alternative.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£1m Estimated value of winner's prize on The X Factor

£7m Estimated value of Simon Cowell's appearance, format and production fees for current series of The X Factor



"We always make our own Christmas cards"

ITV'S takeover of GMTV two weeks ago came as no surprise to staff at the fried-up breakfast station, whose rights to redundancy pay were slashed just before the deal was done. At least 10 percent of them will be laid off in the New Year, with minimal compensation.

No such worries for the GMTV executives who dragged the company into this mire. Many of the top boxwallahs, including those responsible for the phone-competition scandal, have been made redundant with big pay-offs in the past year or so – under the generous "terms and conditions" that are now being revised downwards. The last of the old guard, thirsty programme director Peter "McHic" McHugh, has managed to time his departure (complete with six-figure cheque) perfectly.

At a meeting to welcome his new colleagues, ITV's director of television, Peter Fincham, said that he passed GMTV's offices (on the third, fourth and fifth floors of the building) in his lift on the way to the top every morning, and expressed his pleasure at incorporating the "lowest part of the building" into ITV. Few of the breakfast brigade were charmed by this upstairs-downstairs imagery. They notice that no one from GMTV is invited to the ITV Christmas party, despite all the fond murmurings from the new bosses about how they're all now one big happy family.

Until the deal, GMTV was the *only* part of ITV that was profitable. Henceforth its ad sales and revenue – and profits – will disappear into the ITV ether. And where will the bleary-eyed staff go? "We anticipate there will be efficiencies born out of the integration," trilled a corporate briefing issued on the day of the takeover. "However, there will also be significant opportunities." That would be opportunities to quit television and get a more secure job filling shelves in Tesco, presumably.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

"BBC radio presenter sparks complaints by playing *When Harry Met Sally* 'orgasm' clip on school-run show" – *Headline on Daily Mail website*

"Last night the BBC said: 'We've had not a single complaint or comment.'" – *Very last paragraph of story beneath it*

CHARLES SAATCHI may not be appearing in his own BBC show, *School of Saatchi*, but he was determined in last week's episode that his protégés should be forced to, in the words of judge Matthew Collings, "interact with an ordinary public who has not necessarily any sympathy or tolerance for conceptual art".

And who is this ordinary member of the public shown interacting at great length with Suki Chan and Sam Zealey over their sculpture on the Hastings foreshore while clutching a small dog to her bosom? Why, it is actress Maria McErlane, great friend and holiday companion of Nigella Lawson and her husband Charles Saatchi!

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£11 per month BBC licence fee

£11m per year Amount of that given to management consultants

AD NAUSEAM

IT WOULD be churlish to sneer at Tiger Woods for his various peccadilloes – were it not for the fact that he has made so much money from a string of product endorsements casting him as some kind of granite-willed übermensch. Now, in yet another example of the curse of cash-in, the ads have come to bite him on the arse.

In light of his still-emerging indiscretions, it is unfortunate, for example, that Tag Heuer continues to use press ads with a picture of Woods, a big watch and the line "What are you made of?"

Accenture, meanwhile, was still running "The road to high performance isn't always paved" the day after Woods crashed his car into a tree and then a fire hydrant. The line accompanies a picture of the golfer looking lost in the rough and the copy continues with: "Where do you go from here? Accenture can help make sure that your next steps are the right steps. No matter what direction you want to go. We know what it takes to be a Tiger. Talk to us to see how we can help."

NPOWER has signed up Piers "Morgan" Moron for an ad promoting his and its green credentials over Christmas.

As part of NPower's "An Hour without Power" campaign, Moron will exhort us all to switch everything off to save the planet. Ignoring the fact that this is a man who spends a large portion of his life spuming carbon from first-class air travel in order to be a professional moron on both sides of the Atlantic, in the spirit of Christmas we are happy to support Moron's campaign. May we suggest unplugging the television for an hour at 9pm on Wednesday 30 December?

PS: Don't miss *Piers Morgan's Review of the Year* on ITV1, 9pm, Wednesday 30 December.

SUPERMODELS KERBER

CHRISTIAN LACROIX BANKRUPT!!!
IT'S UNBELIEVABLE!!!....
.....HOW CAN A DESIGNER WHO CREATES EXORBITANTLY OVERPRICED UNWEARABLE COUTURE DO SO BADLY???
IT'S A CRAZY WORLD!!!
NOTHING MAKES SENSE!!!

SIGNAL FAILURES

FCC'd again

COULD the chaos caused by First Capital Connect's driver shortage on the Great Northern and Thameslink lines be linked to FirstGroup's special relationship with the Department for Transport (Daft)?

FirstGroup started bidding for the franchise when Mike Mitchell was its business development manager. Another bidder offered to pay the government a higher premium – usually the clincher – yet FirstGroup won. It was just coincidence that by then Mitchell had become DafT's rail director (*Eye* 1150). Winning the "Greater Western" franchise at the same time made WorstGroup Britain's biggest train operator.

DafT's standard terms meant that from year five, "revenue support" from DafT would cover up to 80 percent of any shortfall between actual and predicted revenue. Until then, WorstGroup would bear any shortfall on both franchises. But weeks after the franchises started in 2006, Mitchell's team and WorstGroup had a tête-à-tête about service cuts in DafT's Greater Western specification, which had provoked a political outcry. FirstGroup agreed to lessen the cuts in return for "revenue support" starting two years early at Greater Western and a year early at FCC. Losing bidders were angry but the National Audit Office wasn't bothered (*Eye* 1241).

Last month WorstGroup told shareholders: "Revenue support provides substantial insulation – 80 percent support at FCC and FGW." In the first half of 2009-10 FGW got £62m revenue support and FCC £15m, while WorstGroup's UK rail profits were £51m. Not only did the bailouts prevent a £26m loss – WorstGroup's UK rail profits were 5.2 percent higher than last year.

Meanwhile National Express Group's east-coast franchise lost money because revenue support wouldn't start until year five. NEG abandoned it 10 days after WorstGroup gloated about "significant de-risking through revenue support".

FCC's bailout comes without strings: it is not obliged, for example, to employ enough drivers to deliver the contracted service. Thameslink services were halved when drivers started refusing to work overtime and rest days last month, exposing FCC's previous reliance on those practices as the norm. Weeks of delays and "revised" timetables will knock FCC's revenue, but WorstGroup needn't rush to resolve the dispute or employ more drivers when its DafT sugar daddy covers 80 percent of the shortfall.

TICKET vending machines (*Eyes passim*) **aren't the only gadgets which make station staff superfluous: there's CCTV too. Southeastern, for instance, says on its website: "To deter anti-social behaviour we are investing in upgrading our CCTV at stations and onboard trains, and introducing it where doesn't currently exist [sic]."**

So an *Eye* reader whose car was stolen from the car park at unstaffed Hollingbourne station, Kent, was glad to spot a camera overlooking the area. Alas, the camera hasn't worked since April 2008. The crime is unlikely to be solved and our reader, who has multiple sclerosis, has lost more than £5,000.

Nor did Southeastern promise to get the camera working: it's putting resources into stations where crime is worse and can't afford functioning CCTV at all its stations. But GoAhead, the plc which owns most of Southeastern, *can* spare £200,000 for special bonuses (*Eye* 1245) for two directors this year – on top of their combined remuneration of £493,000 annual bonuses and £775,000 salaries.

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS

The Confusing Hospital Guide

WHAT's behind the spat between the government's healthcare regulators and data analysts Dr Foster?

In October the Care Quality Commission (CQC) rated Basildon and Thurrock NHS Foundation Trust as "good", but then it highlighted a catalogue of safety failures at the end of last month. It alerted Monitor, the foundation trust regulator, which surprised everyone by sacking the chairman… of Colchester Hospital.

Then up pops Dr Foster, claiming that, from its safety assessments, there are 50 hospitals worse than Colchester, including 11 very poor performers that neither the CQC nor Monitor has highlighted. Meanwhile, the Royal Cornwall NHS Trust, which has been graded "poor" by the CQC four years in a row, received a very impressive safety rating from Dr Foster. Although both the CQC and Dr Foster agreed that Basildon and Thurrock was in dire need of improvement, Monitor was very impressed with the trust's management plans.

Hospitals are complex organisations and the political imperative to reduce everyone to a single band, star rating or adjective has always been ridiculous. How do you rate a hospital with excellent maternity services, an average intensive care unit and a dysfunctional accident department? Some hospitals have good clinical services and poor financial management, and vice versa. To stamp them as "good", "average" or "poor" is meaningless.

Dr Foster has been churning out the Good Hospital Guide since 2001, but it has upped its game in recent years by concentrating on patient safety. This year it got into bed with the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) and developed a forthright scoring system that focuses on how likely a hospital is to harm you. The government and CQC were unprepared for this embarrassment, not least because Dr Foster has been the recipient of sweetheart deals from the Department of Health (*Eyes passim*). However, it lost the NHS Choices contract in 2008 and now seems intent on proving its independence.

The CQC is hamstrung with an old inspection regime, and its legal powers to register (and deregister) all providers of health and social care don't come into play until 1 April 2010. However, the defensiveness with which it faced down media allegations of incompetence was pitiful, particularly the attempt to pass the buck on to its predecessor, the Healthcare Commission, which itself was limited in its powers by government. The CQC will probably survive a Tory bonfire of the quangos, and the NPSA has improved its chances by teaming up with Dr Foster to embarrass Labour.

The highlight of the Dr Foster guide is that it praises best practice, something the CQC would do well to learn. A year ago, the *Eye* highlighted how staff at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust managed to turn around a very high mortality rate by cutting out extraneous bureaucratic targets and focusing on patient safety. This year, Mid Staffordshire is managing the same dramatic improvement and Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust won "Medium Trust of the Year" by doing a succession of obvious things well:

- Bringing back matrons to audit, inspire and observe individual wards;
- Fostering healthy competition between wards;
- Rigorous hand hygiene;
- Ward-employed cleaners;
- Putting clinicians in charge of clinical services;

Having an early-warning system to detect patients who are deteriorating rapidly and a critical care outreach team to sort them out quickly. And they also share information and best practice with neighbouring trusts.

Anyone can massage a paper assessment, but it's much harder to hide blood under the mattress. However, it's often patients and relatives who spot it first, and the one factor missing form health regulation is the use of their experience to spot unsafe care quickly. In every health scandal the *Eye* has exposed, the red flag was raised by those on the receiving end long before the NHS saw fit to act. We have the technology to collect and analyse feedback from the frontline but not quite the willpower to use it. Patients and relatives are fobbed off, whistleblowers are still being shot on sight.

What the NHS needs above all is a culture that encourages speaking up and a system to enable it, so that anyone at the sharp end can raise a concern and know that it will be acted on. The NHS is the only health system in the world attempting comparative scrutiny in such detail, and NHS Choices has made some progress in publishing patient feedback. But there's a way to go before people feel safe to speak up without harming their care or career.

M.D.

The Agri Brigade

WHAT a shame the Commons environment food and rural affairs (EFRA) select committee was too busy with "conflicting parliamentary duties" to hold its public evidence session last month on the collapse of farmer-owned co-operative, Dairy Farmers of Britain (DFoB).

As a result, 1,800 dairy farmers, who through the failure of DFoB have lost an estimated average of £40,000 each (total: £72m), were denied the chance to learn which of the dairy's deregulated drains their money had disappeared down.

Instead of public evidence EFRA took "private briefings" from witnesses and intends to publish a report on the "wider implications" of the DFoB debacle for the milk industry. But the committee needs to get a move on or it may find there's precious little "milk industry" left to report on.

UK milk production is at a 30-year low. In a little over a decade, dairy cow numbers have dropped by 600,000 head (24 percent), while the number of dairy farmers has dropped even more: from 33,000 to 17,000 (48 percent), with 14 producers leaving the industry each week. Britain now imports 1m litres of fresh milk a day from the likes of Belgium and France.

The root of the dramatic decline dates back to the abolition of the Milk Marketing Board (MMB) in 1993. In dairy farming's equivalent of the City's "Big Bang" (look where that led), producers suddenly found themselves working in a deregulated environment. What no politician seemed to remember was that in 1933 the MMB had been created by government legislation to halt the practice of over-mighty dairy companies using predatory pricing tactics against individual dairy farmers.

No surprise, then, that abolition of the MMB and the resulting fragmentation of the milk market appears to have suited dairy companies and large milk retailers better than it has individual dairy farmers. Hence farmers have been subjected to a vicious cost price squeeze with today's farm gate milk price of 24p per litre, lower than it was before the MMB was abolished 15 years ago.

It can only be hoped that EFRA used its "private briefings" to ask if dairy farmers can be expected to continue production with farm gate prices where they are, while the likes of Robert Wiseman Dairies have just reported an 81.5 percent rise in half year profits, to £21 million.

Or perhaps MPs used the session to ask whether it was an objective of deregulation that the likes of Milk Link chief executive Neil Kennedy should earn a basic salary of £280,000, benefits of £33,000 and "bonus" of £158,000 (total: £471,000) while so many dairy farmers either have to quit the industry or continue getting up at 4am and collapsing into bed at 9pm, after two or three daily milkings, with no relief help 365 days a year for, er, 14p a pint.

'New Bio-waste Spreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GONE TO BLAZES

THE FIRE was even more devastating, but at least this time no one died. Otherwise it was déjà-vu for residents of the London borough of Southwark, as 150 firefighters battled against a blaze last month which destroyed 31 properties, just four months after six women and children died when flames swept through the Lakanal House tower block in July.

If Southwark council had learned any lessons from the Lakanal tragedy, they do not appear to have been applied at Carisbrooke Gardens in Peckham.

Southwark's deputy leader and lead member for housing, Tory councillor Kim Humphreys, was quick to blame central government for allowing the block of flats under construction at Sumner Road, where the blaze began, to be built with a timber frame. But it was Southwark council, run by a Lib Dem/Tory coalition, which gave planning permission.

After Lakanal, Humphreys' department did carry out fire risk assessments on the properties which went up in the latest fire. But what those assessments found, the council isn't telling. Residents are angry that one of two fire exits in a medium-rise block in Cator Street had been blocked by the council – requiring people evacuating the building to walk *towards* the fire.

Despite two serious fires in the borough this year, Humphreys appears reluctant to take seriously residents' concerns about fire safety. Before the latest fire a group of locals had asked difficult questions about the housing department's fire procedures. Humphreys responded by telling the local paper the questioners were "selfish". He made his irritation clear by complaining that the questions would cost £100,000 to answer.

One group at whom he will presumably not dare level such an accusation are the families of the dead victims of Lakanal House. They have been told they will receive no legal aid during the inquest which begins on 16 December. Southwark council, on the other hand, has already spent around £200,000 of public money on the legal fees of Burton Copeland, Britain's leading corporate manslaughter specialists.

CARBUNCLE NEWS

AFTER denting his environmental credentials with a scheme to cash in by building 2,000 new homes on the greenbelt outside Bath (*Eye* 1249), the Prince of Wales has further tarnished his image by backing Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly councils' plan to build a monstrous carbuncle in the middle of Penzance harbour.

Brian's Duchy of Cornwall, in cahoots with the two councils, is part of the "Route Partnership" which is determined to force through an unnecessary new multi-million-pound ferry terminal to link Penzance and the Scillies (*Eye* 1250).

In a brilliant hearts-and-minds campaign, the partnership has so far ignored:

- **The Department of Transport**, which will fund the "improvements" but wants an independent review;
- **Penzance town council**'s considered arguments against the plan;
- **Local MP Andrew George**, who warns that the proposals are "politically undeliverable";
- **672 objections** lodged by members of the public, against eight submissions in favour;
- **A formal complaint** of maladministration from the Friends of Penzance Harbour;
- **Cornwall councillors**, who have been cut out of the planning process;
- **English Heritage**, which has condemned the monstrosity.

Despairing locals who have written to Prince Carbuncle begging him to reconsider have not even had their letters acknowledged. It really is appalling.

- **WILL democracy ever take root in Afghanistan? Who knows? Thousands of people in London don't seem to have the hang of it yet.**

A petition for the borough of Tower Hamlets to have its own elected mayor, started at the East London Mosque and enthusiastically backed by George Galloway's Respeck party, has so far gained 17,189 signatures from local electors. Well, not exactly.

After scrutiny by council officials, nearly half the signatories have been rejected. In 2,094 cases no identifiable full name was given. In another 3,408 the names were not on the register of electors. No address was given in 788 cases. In 642 the signatories appeared to exist but not to live in the borough. Ten gave no signature and 14 were too young to vote.

One small council flat was recorded as the address of 12 separate people who had signed on different dates. Perhaps Tower Hamlets should ask Kabul for advice on how to order such matters properly.

BARB COMMENT

STAFF at Westminster city council have opened a book on how long the council's newly appointed £150,000 finance director, Barbara Moorhouse, will grace them with her presence.

As the Tory flagship's chief exec, Mike More, says: "Barbara Moorhouse has an exemplary record of achievement across the public and private sector and will be a real asset… [she] has the skills, attributes and qualities that are needed to help lead one of the best-performing local authorities in the country."

So in-demand is Ms Moorhouse, 51, that no sooner does she get her feet under the desk in one job than she is head-hunted and off to the next! Companies House records reveal an impressive 52 resigned directorships, including a number in dissolved companies.

In 1997 she was appointed chief finance officer for software company Kewill Systems, departing in 2002. In 2003 she joined Scala Business Solutions, but she resigned in 2004. During this period she was also a non-executive director of the Child Support Agency. In March 2005 she moved to the Department for Constitutional Affairs as "director general finance", morphing along with the DCA into the Ministry of Justice at its inception in May 2007. In the highlight of her career to date, she was named the DCA's "junketer-in-chief" by *Eye* 1208 after FoI requests revealed she had enjoyed hospitality from IT firms and consultants 47 time in 2005 and 2006.

Last year she moved on for a brief stint as director of corporate resources at the Department for Transport. In former lives she worked for nursery company Jigsaw and South West Water – in which capacity she was booed, Tony Blair-style, when she spoke to the WI. Hopefully she will have a kinder reception at Westminster.

ONAN THE DARLONIAN

RESIDENTS of Darlington, County Durham, are proud of the town's status as the site of the world's first commercial railway, George Stephenson's Stockton & Darlington line, which opened in 1825. The "Darlington Experiment", as it was known at the time, helped change the world.

Rather less likely to have such an outcome is the "Darlington Experiment" of 2009: a cringe-inducing attempt to boost the town's profile with a "cool" website.

The Experiment – expensively devised for a regeneration body called the Darlington Partnership, part-funded by the Labour council – offers young people the chance to upload photos, music and video clips extolling the virtues of their home town. In an attempt to get down wiv da yoof, the site was given its own terminology. Users were to be known as "choochers" [*geddit?*] and would "chooch" their favourite clips on to the web.

Alas, no one checked whether the happening new term was already in use. A simple Google search reveals one definition, on urbandictionary.com: "Chooching – to masturbate while crying." A minority pastime, perhaps, but there you are.

An alternative moronic neologism – "dxting" – was introduced in time for the website's launch. But nobody thought to tell the council's printers, who were about to put the council's mag, the *Town Crier,* to bed – so bemused residents at 40,000 homes were soon reading all about the choochin' phenomenon.

The website's hit rate has been low. YouTube, meanwhile, continues to be loaded with clips of the real "Darlo": teens happy-slapping in parks and vomiting outside nightclubs.

- **TOUGH times necessitate tough decisions. So it is with regret that Skidrow-on-Sea council is lining up more than 150 employees for the chop as part of an attempt to save £8m.**

Tory leader Mary Mears is by no means heartless. "Having to lay off any staff is always a difficult decision," she tells the Brighton Argus. From Lisbon. While on a cruise. Heartless, no. But several other words ending in "less" – including those beginning with "tact", "wit" and "use" – spring to mind.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

WHEN choosing a site for a £40m regeneration scheme in the former steel town of Consett, Durham county council had two options: Berry Edge, a 700-acre former steelworks site that closed in 1980; and Belle Vue, home to a football club and public playing fields. Surprise, surprise, it plumped for building over the playing fields.

The whole Berry Edge site was given to Derwentside district council by British Steel, and plans to regenerate the area with a swimming pool and sports hall were already in the pipeline. But following the reorganisation of local authorities in April, Consett is now run by Durham council, which announced plans to use the Belle Vue site instead for a sports centre, plus a university-sponsored academy school. Its excuses include hedging that the steelworks site "may or may not contain contamination" – very reassuring for the houses, restaurant and college already recently developed elsewhere on the site.

After months of pleading, local Lib Dem Owen Temple was permitted to see a £135,000 consultants' report on the Berry Edge site that has been gathering dust since April and was never presented to councillors. That report shows no reason not to develop at Berry Edge and reveals that it would in fact offer more savings, not to mention "the possibility that they can be expanded at some time in the future, an option that does not exist with… Belle Vue."

Consett residents are now applying to have the playing fields declared a village green.

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT IS a British tradition that government ministers should know nothing about the nature of the business of the department they preside over. But it's a bit much when a minister actually dislikes what he or she is obliged to administer or protect.

Yet now we have (for a second time) as minister of state for culture and tourism, Margaret Hodge, who actively dislikes modern architecture, or "concrete monstrosities" as she puts it so winningly. Contemptuous of expert advice, she thinks that "if a building is less than, say, 75 years old, we should be able to consider matters other than the architectural or historical value in deciding whether to list", failing to understand that listing is not an absolute preservation order but a recognition of architectural and/or historical significance.

Mrs Hodge has put her prejudices into effect by rejecting English Heritage's advice that Birmingham Central Library merits listing. Built in 1969-73 and designed by the John Madin Design Group, it may not be everyone's cup of tea but it is good of its sort. The new "Pevsner" for the city by Andy Foster considers it "The finest example of the Brutalist aesthetic in Birmingham, and a civic project of European importance, the largest of its time in the city".

Having destroyed the earlier Central Library, a fine mid-Victorian building, in the redevelopment mania 40 years ago, Birmingham council now wants to replace this building with a new library by Milord Rogers' firm (who else?) on a different and less convenient site. Madin's Library, built with huge sums of public money, is where a library ought to be: next to the Town Hall and Birmingham's Art Gallery & Museum. It should be listed.

Mrs Hodge's prejudice and ignorance isn't confined to 20th century buildings. She has also rejected English Heritage's advice that the former chapel, or Garrison Church, at the former Chelsea Barracks deserves listing. Designed by the obscure George Morgan, it is the only surviving relic of the Victorian barracks built near the Royal Hospital in 1860-63.

These buildings were replaced a century later by the austerely elegant modern barracks which have now been cleared away to make the problematic development site which is now owned by Qatari Diar, that is, the ruling family of the State of Qatar, the oil-rich Arab emirate.

The controversial development plans for the site by the Richard Rogers firm required demolition of the redundant Garrison Church. But these, mercifully, have been abandoned (*Eye* 1235) and Rogers has gone off in a huff, claiming £1.5m in unpaid fees. Qatari Diar is now deciding which firm of architects should be chosen to prepare a design for developing the large site. Meanwhile the Chelsea Barracks Action Group is campaigning to ensure the church is retained as a place of worship or as a community or social centre – a reasonable idea.

Now it cannot be claimed that the brick chapel, designed in a sort of Italianate Romanesque style, is a great work of Victorian architecture, but that is not the point. It is historically interesting as the only tangible reminder of the military use of the site and it is apparently the only surviving garrison church in the south of England. The interior is handsome and retains mosaic floors and tiled wall panels which are memorials to Grenadier Guards who died in Britain's Late Victorian colonial wars. In other words, the building is partly a war memorial and that surely ought to matter. But Margaret Hodge considers that the chapel does not "reach the level of interest of other listed examples" and that it lost most of its historical interest "when it was stripped of its contents".

If the Qataris choose a competent architect, the Victorian building can be incorporated into any new development of housing and flats. This, however, will result in a loss of residential accommodation and hence income. The Emir of Qatari's ambassador recently asked the government not to list the chapel, but I am sure that had no influence whatever on the decision taken by our dispassionate Minister of State for Culture and Tourism.

MY PICTURE shows an inspired and resourceful piece of modern design. It is by Rick Mather

Architects, the fashionable firm without an intervention by whom no self-respecting art gallery, museum or Oxford college is complete.

In 2004 Keble College bought the redundant Acland Memorial Hospital site to build a new quad for undergraduate residences, teaching and research. Mather's first redevelopment scheme required the demolition of the original building of 1896-97 – the first purpose-built nursing home in the country – by Sir Thomas Graham Jackson ("Anglo-Jackson"), the eminent Victorian, despite it being listed at grade II.

This was opposed by English Heritage and the Victorian Society and turned down earlier this year by Oxford city council. Now Mather has come up with a thoughtful new scheme which incorporates the façade of the listed building into his brilliant modernist conception. Mather, of course, would not dream of responding to the form, colour or texture of Jackson's charming "Queen Anne" design. Oh no. Instead, he makes it look pathetic by placing it in the middle of his modern elevations designed in frank and fearless contrast to the old. No wonder our prime minister recently insisted: "British design and architecture are second to none."

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Carrefour catalogue*

Submitted by Verity Blanchet. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

EVERY Brussels policy edict comes with green edging nowadays.

So when Monaco suggested in September that the best way to conserve the highly endangered and emblematic Atlantic bluefin tuna was to ban international trade in it, the European Commission was quick to lend its support – only to huff and puff when Spain and other Mediterranean countries declined to back it up.

Behind all the talk of sustainability, EU money has in fact been bankrolling the bluefin-decimating fleets. Spanish green MEP Raül Romeva has discovered that the commission has paid €33.4m since 2000 to vessels licensed for bluefin fishing. These boats, many owned by industrial fishing conglomerates, are rather less concerned with conservation than they are with selling at premium prices to the Japanese as much of the giant tuna as possible.

Oui, M. Sarkozy; Non, M. Sarkozy; Trois sacs plein, M. Sarkozy

Although the commission has repeatedly talked about the need to reduce Europe's fishing-fleet capacity, most of the subsidy has been spent on new vessels that will terrorise any remaining bluefin for years to come. EU money has helped pay for no fewer than 121 boats that participated in bluefin fishing in 2009, including 15 "purse seiners", hated by environmentalists because they indiscriminately scoop up sealife in giant drawstring bags. Meanwhile, scrappage payments have been made for just nine vessels. Pass the salt and vinegar!

COMMUNITIES

"The high price of petrol is already a bone of contention for the British motorist and a further hike in the cost on the forecourt would do serious damage to the freight haulage community." – *Observer, 29 November*

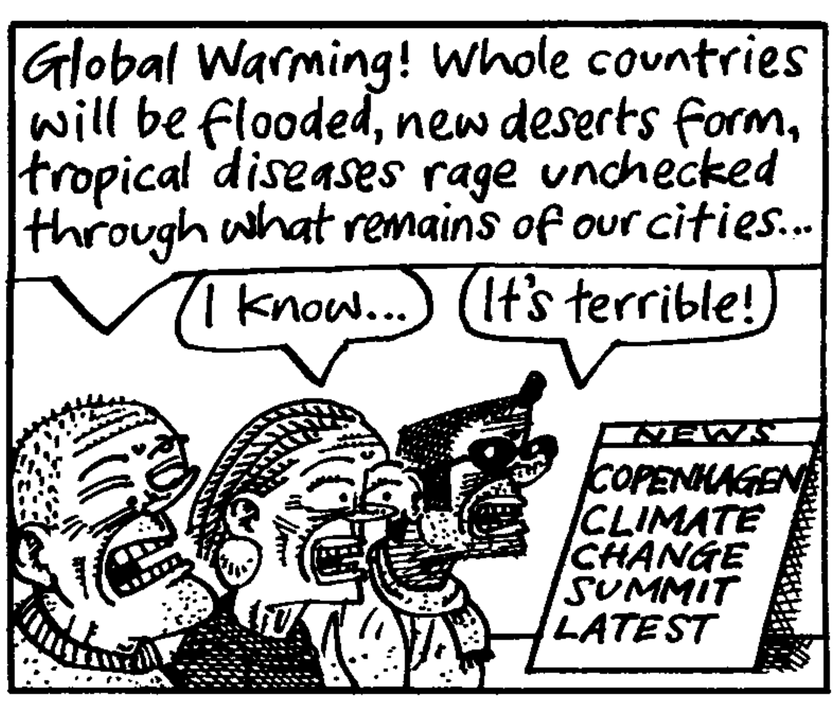
"England's professional rat-catching community produced at least two instructive books during the Victorian years." – *Guardian, 1 December*

"What comes across from the leaked emails and has been confirmed elsewhere is the tight-knit nature of the global warming community." – *Letter to the Guardian, 26 November*

"The local canal community have raised concerns to us about improving security on the canals following an isolated incident of burglary." – *West Midlands Police, November Newsletter*

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Global Warming! Whole countries will be flooded, new deserts form, tropical diseases rage unchecked through what remains of our cities...
I know...
It's terrible!
NEWS
COPENHAGEN CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT LATEST

Letters

Chambers potty

Sir,

Re "Journalism, Libel and the Law" (Street of Shame, Eye 1244). I always admire your boldness in defying England's intimidating libel laws. I too have suffered bruises from the mercenary fists of Carter Ruck. You wrote a good story about us last month, and in a good cause.

It's a shame, however, that you didn't check the facts. We haven't been sued for libel. We haven't changed our approach to the stories we run.

We publish investigative analyses of the legal profession and have been doing so for fifteen years. This tradition will continue. You say we're stuffy, and of course we're not Private Eye. But Client Report (now The Chambers Magazine) pursues truth as we find it, and compared to other business magazines we are objective and hard-hitting and we resist every kind of PR manipulation.

Yours,
MICHAEL CHAMBERS,

Via email.

Scanning for news

Sir,

Re "CT Scandal" (In the Back, Eye 1247), I fail to understand the suggested scandal. We provided a scan for a patient and the radiologist couldn't see anything untoward, when unfortunately there was. A mistake was made, we said so when we became aware of the problem and we compensated the patient.

Shock, horror, probe! It must have been a desperately slow news week for you!

Yours sincerely,
TARQUIN DESOUTTER,

Chairman, Lifescan Ltd.

Deadly wait

Sir,

There is another distressing angle to the issue of delays surrounding paediatric post mortems (Medicine Balls, Eye 1250). In my experience, as someone involved in supporting families in these circumstances, the children's bodies are often taken to a hospital some distance from the family home and are not released to the parents for a number of weeks. Not only does this mean an agonizingly long wait before a funeral can be arranged, it also means that when the body is finally returned it is sometimes not in a sufficiently good state to be viewed. The distress this causes to families is painful to see. What it must feel like is unimaginable.

Yours,
A CLERGYMAN.

Credibility Gap

Sir,

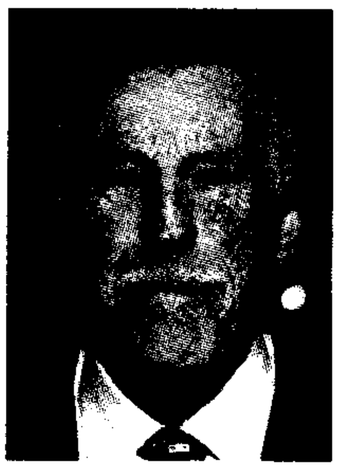
May I heap another dollop of opprobrium on the hapless hack who distastefully drew a comparison between Laurence Binyon's poem For the Fallen *and some jobbing Midlands footballer still able to kick and run at the ripe old age of 34? (Pseuds Corner, Eye 1250).*

It is "highly unlikely", we are told, that Binyon "ever ventured north of the Watford Gap." In fact Binyon was born in Lancaster and lived for the first few years of his childhood in Burton-in-Lonsdale, in the shadow of mighty Ingleborough, memories of which inspired, among others, his delightful poem Inheritance.

HAROLD HEYS,

Darwen.

Lookalike



Shroud

Forsyth

Sir,

I couldn't help noticing the resemblance between that gruesome medieval fake Bruce Forsyth and the all-singin', all-dancin' entertainer the Turin Shroud. Should Brucie's jokes be carbon-dated?

Best wishes,
RICHARD WOODWARD,

Via email.

Pseudo Names

... Unlike my compatriots B. Day and P. Soir, I find Pseudo Names pretty ordinary fare.

VANDA TABLE.

... Full steam ahead for more Pseudo Names.

I.I. CAPN.

... Re the recent Crossword and Celeb print alignment gaffes, it has become clear that there is a decline in publishing standards at the Eye. May I suggest that someone is severely punished for this laxness? It doesn't have to be a senior person, perhaps an office junior to make an example of and appease complainants.

ZACHARY FISHER-LAMB.

... It all ends. It all has to end.

N. TROPY.

... The way in which the EU appointed its President shows that they've gone mad.

TOULOUSE LE PLOT.

... As it is always wet in Cumbria, they should have been better prepared.

WAYNE E. DAYS.

... The problem with the Pseudo Names column is that many of the contributions are overblown and lacking in substance.

M.T. RHETT (ERIC).

... I see you keep saying you're going to end this popular section, but it's still there. I don't think you've any intention of stopping it.

JUSTIN M.T. FRET.

... Surely it's time you consigned Pseudo Names to the history books.

SUE TONIUS.

... If you ever decide to form a First XI of made-up names, you will need a coach. I wish to put my name forward for this position. I am an internationally renowned coach. I am particularly good with the pictures I use in team talks.

SVEN DIAGRAM.

... Why, I wonder, do so many of your readers get so worked up about the fate of your Pseudo Names feature?

C.F.I. KERR.

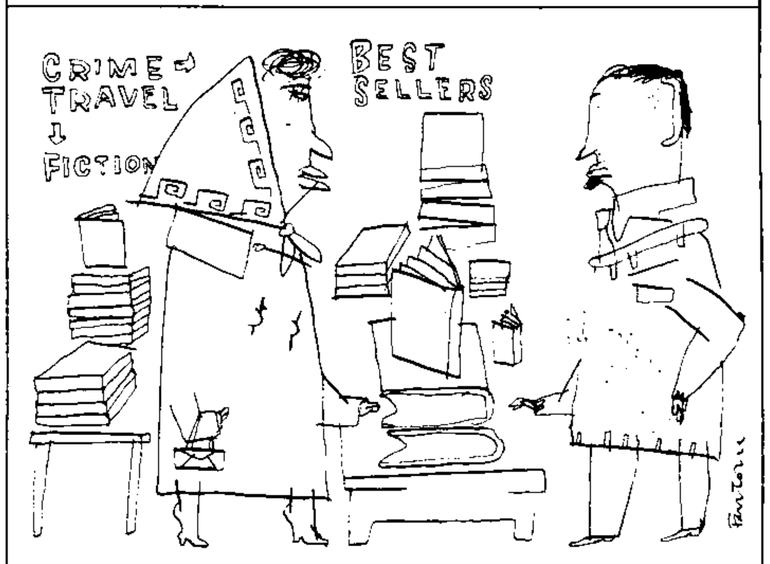
... We have no doubt that this excellent feature will still be entertaining your readers when we have been long gone from this world.

R. ZLONGA
VITA BREVIS.

... Re the "cast-iron promise", can I safely assume this ensures nothing will change and I can be among the first to welcome back this most amusing segment.

SAL VAYTAY.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Do you have any autobiographies not written by a TV celebrity?"

Ant & decked

Sir,

'Remote Controller' claims that Ant/Dec must "bizarrely" be unaware that Katie Price is no longer married to Peter Andre (Eye TV, 1250). This was founded on the fact that Ant/Dec made the suggestion that Peter's phone bill must be very large after voting on the show. Surely they are simply (albeit poorly) joking that he is venting his anger at her about the divorce by voting for her to eat kangaroo scrotum?

It seems that for me to have to explain this feeble joke to your supposedly insightful satirical publication is what's truly bizarre.

Yours pedantically,
MR D. PASPARAKIS,

Via email.

Sir,

*'Remote Controller' referred to the televisual programme "I'm A Celebrity.Get Me Out of Here" as a "decompression tank" for slebs on the way down. Decompression chambers are used by deep-sea divers on the way **up**, to prevent decompression sickness (commonly known as "the bends") caused by the precipitation of dissolved gases into bubbles inside the body on depressurisation.*

Yes, I know.

Regards,
TONY O'BRIEN,

Via email.

Lookalike

Leahy

Henry

Sir,

I read of your problems over the photograph of Sir Terry Leahy (Honorary Degree, Eye 1250) and found he was featured in this week's Welwyn & Hatfield Times. Whilst writing, I should mention that I noticed his uncanny resemblance to Henry VII in choice of hat and ermine.

However, there the likeness ends, for Henry was described thus: "He made sure every penny of tax was collected and paid to him. People who lived on his lands were charged higher rents. Henry even forced rich people to lend him money." Yours sincerely,

MICHAEL CLARK,

Tewin, Herts.

Pedantry Corner

... I'm afraid the pedantic Claire Webster (Eye No 1250) has made the common mistake of thinking that flotsam is floating material and jetsam is material washed up on shore. That is incorrect. Jetsam is material, either floating or washed ashore, that was deliberately jettisoned from a ship. Flotsam is floating material that was not deliberately jettisoned, such as material afloat as a result of a shipwreck. There is a third category, lagan, which originally meant wreckage at the bottom of the sea but which now means material jettisoned but identified for possible later retrieval.

Perhaps I should get out more, but this stuff is my job, so perhaps I should get back to work.

MARTIN DAVIES

(Admiralty Law Institute Professor of Maritime Law, Director, Tulane Maritime Law Center, USA)

... Your Kampala correspondent needs to brush up on his/her Arabic. The Somali insurgent group is not Al Shahaab (the blaze, shooting star, or something similar) but Al Shabaab (the youths).

KEITH HASKELL.

Salve, Dominus Gnomus!

I always enjoy the honorary degree citations in Oculus Privatus because, as a mediocre student of largely grammar-free Nuffield Latin lessons 40 years ago, I can follow them perfectly.

Compared to proper Latin, Roman numerals are easy so I was shocked by the glaring error in Eye 1249 where 1962 was rendered as CMMLXII in the citation to Davidum Frosticum. Nay, nay, and thrice nay! (as Lurcio would have said in Up Pompeii).

PAULUS NICHOLAS BLEZARD.

... In your mildly amusing piece ("Pudsey's Night of Shame, Eye 1250), you refer to "a fine tooth comb". As any school nurse knows, this should read "a fine-toothed comb".

Sorry to be such a nit-picker.

BRIAN LEEDHAM.

All Rev'd up

Sir,

Rev Philip Foster MA (Letters, Eye 1250) does not believe in climate change, despite the evidence. I assume he believes in a God and a life hereafter despite the total lack of evidence for either. Nuff said.

NOEL HANNON,

London SW8.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The great thing about Campbell is his work ethic. No defender can rest when he's breathing down their shoulders."

ALAN SMITH, Sky Sports 1
(Nick Kenway)

"He [Jermaine Defoe] was just literally on fire..."

Caller, Radio 5 Live
(Tony Bateman)

"The banks have made people green with anger over the last few years."

EVAN DAVIS, BBC Radio 4
(Name and address withheld)

"This free-kick is going to be a left or a right-footed strike."

GERRY ARMSTRONG, Sky Sports 2
(John McCready)

"... then Rooney scored after a fluid exchange with Giggs..."

SIMON BROTHERTON, BBC1
(Philip Lewis)

A GRIM CHRISTMAS PARTY

KNIFE & PACKER

THE OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY IS A TIRED TRADITION, RIPE TO BE DEBUNKED!
IT'S ALL SO PREDICTABLE: WELL NOT ON OUR WATCH!
OSAKA'S SUSHI HUT: INSPIRED!
THIS TURKEY & CRANBERRY SASHIMI IS TO DIE FOR!
"SECRET SANTA": A STRICT SPEND LIMIT AND PRESENTS RECEIVED AT RANDOM
IT'S A UNIQUE WINDOW ON COLLEAGUES LIFESTYLES
JUST WHAT I ALWAYS WANTED: A BALSAMIC VINEGAR PIPETTE...
OK, FESS UP! WHO BOUGHT ME THIS SET OF LACE DOILIES?!?
TO BE CONTINUED...

Letter from **Beijing**

from Our Own Correspondent

HOW the Chinese must yearn for the good old days of George W Bush. Dubya couldn't swing his nine-iron without Uncle Sam effigies being burned in the developing world, and China has been the main beneficiary of anti-US sentiment.

But his replacement cuts a different dash. So when the world's first superstar president descended on the Middle Kingdom, what fun was had by all.

Living up to their hard-earned reputation for penetrative political reporting, the Chinese media spent much of the week before Obama's arrival arguing about how his name should be transliterated into Mandarin. In the absence of an equivalent O-sound, critics were divided between Aobama and Oubama. Beijing's street vendors simply responded by launching the "Obamao" range – T-shirts, bags and fridge magnets showing the US president dressed Chairman-style in an olive-green communist worksuit.

Obamao's first stop was Shanghai, where he held a "town hall meeting" with a group of Chinese students. In the spirit of modern democracy, most of China's dissidents had been banged up a few days before Obama arrived and the script wrangled out in advance by diplomatic sherpas.

One "unharmonious" question did slip through the net, however. It came from the US ambassador to China, who, at the behest of the US press corps, asked the president whether he agreed with internet censorship. Unsurprisingly the "Leader of the Free World" said he did not. Obama's response was thoughtful and considered, but the western media had their headline: "Obama denounces China's internet censorship". The Chinese quietly erased this lapse and lauded the meeting as democracy in action.

Obama then headed to Beijing to meet his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, and here the party really started. It seems the two found little common ground, with the hosts refusing to budge on the US's top issues of renminbi undervaluation and China's $2 trillion trade surplus. Meanwhile, Obama raised human rights and Tibet, the Chinese government's three least favourite words.

Hu's demeanour was a masterclass in diplomatic pique, impeccably polite and resolutely haughty, but this did not stop Chinese newspapers devoting acres of column space to the "historic" talks – with no mention of human rights or the T-word.

Another word nobody mentioned was race, for as fate would have it, Obama's arrival coincided with an acute bout of national soul-searching over Chinese perceptions of black people. In recent weeks China has been gripped by the tale of Lou Jing, a half-Chinese, half-African student from Shanghai who reached the final of the popular TV talent show *Oriental Angel*. The "Chocolate Princess", as Jing has been dubbed, has divided public opinion in China, hailed by some as a harbinger of change to the country's deep-rooted racism and criticised by others for her impure blood and "dirty" skin.

Keen to demonstrate the government's stance, Hu Jintao was afforded multiple photo opps with black members of Obama's entourage. In a further act of racial tolerance Chinese-style, at a gala dinner in Obama's honour, the president was treated to special arrangements of "black music" played by the People's Liberation Army band.

It is not known if Obama enjoyed the versions of Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called to Say I Love You* and *We Are the World* by Michael Jackson. Still, at least racism would seem to be one issue where China and America have plenty of common ground.

So what has this all-singing, all-dancing meeting of the "G2" achieved? They've managed to reduce significantly expectations over the size of any deal at Copenhagen, and agreed to continue disagreeing on issues they previously disagreed upon. The PLA band has learnt some new tunes and Obama has seen the Forbidden City. The eunuchs on both sides should be delighted!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O Cow Dung Ingestion and Inhalation Dependence: a Case Report. *By Praveen Khairkar, Prashant Tiple, and Govind Bang.*

Abstract. Although abuse of several unusual inhalants had been documented before, addiction to cow dung fumes or their ashes has not yet been reported in medical literature. Inhalant substances are widely available and are frequently misused, especially by adolescent males. These substances include aerosols, glues, gasoline, paint thinner,

kerosene, nail polish remover, petrol, and boot polish. We herein report the first case of dependence on cow dung, in inhalation and ingestion form.

Mrs D – a 34-year-old married right-handed vegetable vendor from Wardha, Central India, and mother of two children – was brought to our rural psychiatric outpatient unit in May 2008 by her husband, who complained of her irresistible desire to eat cow dung ashes during the previous four years. She had behaved normally until the age of 30, when one day she used cow dung ash (known in this part of India as "Kanda") in place of coal ash for cleaning her teeth. She liked the taste of Kanda, and quickly developed a chronic addiction to it..." *(International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 11/6/09. Spotter: Martin G)*

– O –

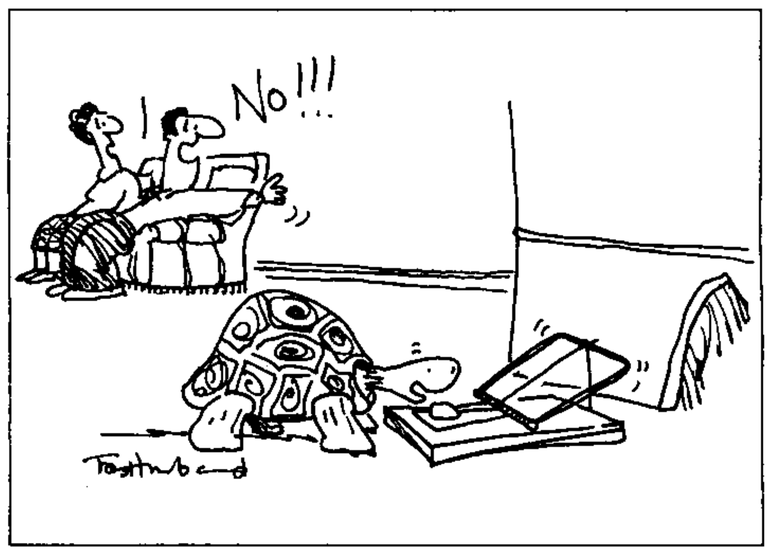
O *"Preserving the memories of deadly disasters may seem odd to Westerners," Yutaka Kanasaki of Japan Airlines told reporters at the company's Crash Museum in Tokyo, "but the point is not to dwell on death, it's to preserve life. We encourage our employees and the public to come here, to see for themselves the crushed tail sections and twisted passenger seats, as well as the personal effects of passengers, such as pens, keys, and spectacles. JAL has not had a fatal crash since 1985, but we don't want the sadness of an air tragedy to fade out amongst our employees. We want to pass the knowledge of aviation risks onto the next generation."*

All Nippon Airways (which has not had a fatal crash since 1971) also maintains its own Crash Museum, near Haneda Airport. "There are thousands of items recovered from crash sites," said ANA spokesman Rob Henderson, "including mangled black boxes, charred aircraft wreckage, and photographs of row upon row of coffins, surrounded by weeping widows and orphans. There's even a final message from a doomed passenger, scrawled onto an air sickness bag as his plane went down, asking his wife to take care of their children. Fifty-five per cent of aviation catastrophes are caused by human error, and this exhibition shows the potentially catastrophic consequences of a simple mistake. It is also in keeping with Japanese traditions of displaying contrition and guilt for mistakes." (Jakarta Globe, 8/10/09. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

– O –

O "The Mortuary Services Office has already invested $7.7 million in this recycling scheme," spokesperson Yang Yi-lin told reporters in Taipei, "and we will not abort the project now. The Taiwan government passed a major renewable energy bill earlier this year, as part of a plan to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 2008 levels by 2016, and we must all play our part in achieving that goal. This scheme merely takes the exhaust from the crematorium ovens and converts it into electricity, which will then be used to power the air conditioning system in the second-floor rest area of the building. So we are simply recycling the cremation exhaust to reduce air pollution and protect the environment. But we will of course take the feelings of relatives into account."

However, Taipei City Councillor Chuang Ruei-hsiung angrily denounced the scheme as immoral. "It's creepy that the mourners at a funeral are being cooled by air-conditioning that is powered by the burning bodies of their loved ones who are being incinerated downstairs," he protested. "The crematorium management are even talking about powering the lighting system with electricity generated by the burning bodies. It's insensitive and upsetting to grieving relatives of the deceased." *(Taiwan News, 8/10/09. Spotter: Andy Stone)*



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Baroness Warsi pelted with eggs

My youngest daughter saw the picture of the Baroness in Luton with the Muslim protestors and she thought that the one with the big beard was Father Christmas. I reassured her that it was not Santa, and explained that he would like to stone her to death. She has had nightmares for nearly a week now. – ***Emily***

Any muslim santa comes near my girls I swear Ill do time – ***Family_Man***

england seedid in world cup islam not evan in the draw choke on that muslim scum – ***England_till_I_die***

Luton was historically Leueton, or loo town. That's toilet in new money! lol! – ***Danny_Daz***

Sluice the effluent effendi and let sweetness prevail in Bury Park – ***Voice_of_Reason***

As a lad I enjoyed the I-Spy book of English castles. My grandson will have the I-Spy book of English mosques. Time to follow the Swiss approach to planning permission. – ***Gerard***

baraness admit's shes ownly a practis-ing muslin but the nutter's blame her for be-ing not perfick yet? jus becaus she still has nice haire an makeup an do'nt go out in a white dress-ing gown? not bein funny but no wonder the proper lady muslin's have to ware hood's to hide there beard's? – ***Hayley_321***

muslim's say they hate gay's but funny how you never see a wierdy beardy with a bird FACT – ***Think_about_it***

not all muslim's r beardy nutjob's wat about the geezer with the mullit haircut who through the egg Presscot chin-ed him and never got blown up result! – ***Prima_Donut***

The "Baroness" (appointed by whom and why?) claims that most moslems are good eggs. The yolk is most definitely on her. – ***Brown_out***

If they like medieval life so much then pay their benefits in groats. – ***Make_My_Day***

if the bnp done this you hipocrits would all be bangin on about it – ***Eye_4_an_eye***

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 59

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

We stand on the edge of an unimaginable abyss. If this catastrophe comes about, it will be the greatest man-made disaster in the history of the world.

If we fail to take the action that is necessary to avert this cataclysmic event, our grandchildren will never forgive us.

"Why did you let this happen?" they will say. "Why did you do nothing to stop it?"

As they look around their devastated world and weep for their lost heritage, how will you ever be able to look them in the eye again?

Comrades will know only too well what I am referring to – the threat to our whole way of life posed by the terrifying menace of runaway Old Etonianism.

Yes, that is the horrifying possibility that now looms over us – the triumph of the Bullingdonian-Cameronian-Borisite claque, taking us back to the darkest days of the 19th Century.

Do we really want to see a Britain where starving children in cloth caps are forced barefoot up chimneys to mine coal whilst the toffee-nosed Etonian snobs in their top hats ride about in gilded coaches, scoffing cream buns, swilling champagne from crystal goblets and puffing at cigars, while lording it over the millions of malnourished, unemployed, hard-working members of the British proletariat who are forced to queue for bowls of thin gruel before being locked up in the workhouse.

This is the reality of the disaster we are facing if this government remains in power for much longer. *(You haven't got this quite right yet, Gordon. The point we're trying to put over here is that it's the next government that will be the horror story. Are you still taking your Zombadril – remember, it's two tablets every half hour, after the Bonkazapam. They're the blue ones that I've left on your desk, next to your new signed photograph of Reese Witherspoon – not Renee Witherspoon or Reese Zellweger!!!!! Alastair Campbell, Supreme Communications Adviser to the Supreme Leader.)*

Yours,

Gordon Brown

(Signed in his absence, A. Campbell)

A Message From Comrade Darling

I must warn my French colleagues not to attempt to interfere with the running of our British banking sector. When it comes to regulating our People's Banks, only the British government has the right to tell our bankers how to run their affairs. As Comrades will know, I am the man to take tough measures against any Comrades working in the banking community who try to award themselves multi-million pound bonuses.

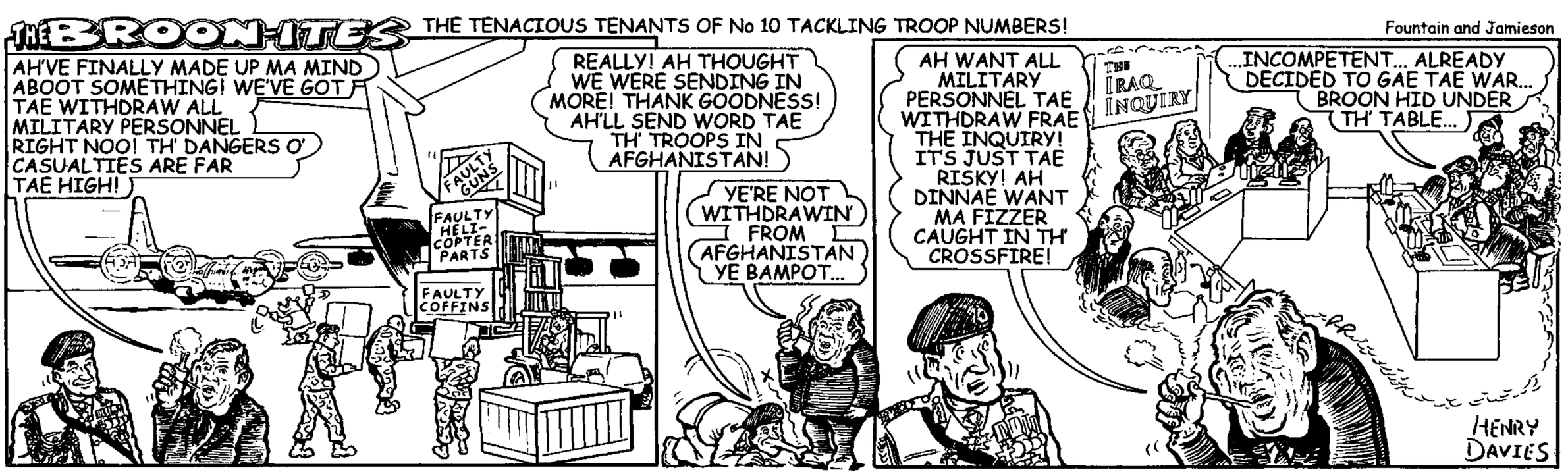
Comrade President Sarkozy should realise that when it comes to cracking down on the failures of the Anglo-Saxon capitalist model, this government does not need any help from our continental friends.

Which is why this week I shall be announcing that I am very seriously considering imposing a windfall tax on all bankers' bonuses to show the greedy neo-casino capitalist running dogs that this party means business!!

In fact, we are very pro-business, which is why we will consider very closely all the technical problems involving a new tax of this kind to see whether it is a feasible option, which it may well not be, and in fact it probably isn't.

A.D.
Supreme Commissar for Financial Affairs

Comrade Darling pictured here explaining to a group of workers why he cannot just wave a magic wand and make the economy alright again – although, obviously, the measures taken by the Supreme Leader will have much the same effect. A.C.


THE BROON-ITES
THE TENACIOUS TENANTS OF No 10 TACKLING TROOP NUMBERS!
Fountain and Jamieson
AH'VE FINALLY MADE UP MA MIND ABOOT SOMETHING! WE'VE GOT TAE WITHDRAW ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL RIGHT NOO! TH' DANGERS O' CASUALTIES ARE FAR TAE HIGH!
REALLY! AH THOUGHT WE WERE SENDING IN MORE! THANK GOODNESS! AH'LL SEND WORD TAE TH' TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN!
FAULTY GUNS
FAULTY HELI-COPTER PARTS
FAULTY COFFINS
YE'RE NOT WITHDRAWIN' FROM AFGHANISTAN YE BAMPOT...
AH WANT ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL TAE WITHDRAW FRAE THE INQUIRY! IT'S JUST TAE RISKY! AH DINNAE WANT MA FIZZER CAUGHT IN TH' CROSSFIRE!
THE IRAQ INQUIRY
...INCOMPETENT... ALREADY DECIDED TO GAE TAE WAR... BROON HID UNDER TH' TABLE...
HENRY DAVIES

ENGLAND WINS WORLD CUP

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man In Capetown With The Biltong And The Six-Pack Of Extra-Strength Joburg Lager ('Probably The Worst Lager In The World')

ENGLAND won the World Cup again for a sensational third time after a nailbiting draw in Capetown.

"Yes, we've won!" said everybody after England skilfully avoided the "Group of Death" and found themselves playing America, Algeria and Slovenia.

Said skipper John Terry, "My dream has come true. The World Cup is already in my bedroom and we haven't even kicked a ball yet."

ON OTHER PAGES
Why haven't our World Cup heroes been knighted yet? **94**

ROW GROWS OVER MEDAL 'HOAX' CLAIM

by **William GeorgeCross**

VETERANS today queried the bona fides of a man seen sporting a row of medals to which he was "not entitled" at a Remembrance Day parade.

The veterans' suspicions were aroused when the man in question, calling himself only "Prince Charles", was caught wearing all of the following medals: the Grand Order of King Leopold of the Belgians (1st class); the Star of the Siege of Leningrad; the McDonalds' Employee of the Week; the Campaign Medal for the Battle of Hastings; the Purple Heart (Korea) and the Blue Peter Badge (1972).

Queen's Schilling

When confronted, the Prince said that he was in the SAS and therefore bound by the Official Secrets Act.

He added that his war record was a private matter and he would be instructing his solicitors, Messrs Carter and Ruck, to prevent any further discussion of the matter.

POETRY CORNER

with guest poet
Carol Ann Duff

Xmas Turkey

Rudolph the Red Nosed
Reindeer.
Had a very shiny nose.
Because a policeman
Attacked him during
Demonstrations about
Global warming..

I'm dreaming of a white
Christmas,
Just like the BNP
Who are bastards.

...and with guest poet
William Blake

Tiger, Tiger

Tiger, Tiger, not so bright
In the middle of the night
What on earth was going on?
Perhaps we shall never know.
(Not one of my best, but put it in if you like. W.B.)

Reprinted from *Songs Of Innocence Until Proven Guilty*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Richard Todd, Film Star And Real-Life War Hero

So. Farewell
Then
Richard Todd.

Star of *The Dambusters.*

You played Guy
Gibson VC.

"Steady. Steady.
Steady. Down
A little. Steady.
NOW!"

Yes. That was
Your catchphrase.

In the film
You had a
Black Labrador
Which we
Had better call
Nigel.

And what
About your
Theme tune?
All together now –
Da da da da
Diddy dum dum da...

E.J. Thribb (17½)

In Memoriam Maggie Jones – acid-tongued battleaxe Blanche in *Coronation Street* (Deirdre's mother and Ken Barlow's mother-in-law)

So. Farewell
Then Maggie
Jones.

Acid-tongued Battleaxe
Blanche
In *Coronation Street*,
(Deirdre's mother
And Ken Barlow's
Mother-in-law).

Now, like so many
Others in the cast,
You have made your
Last exit.

But the show goes on.
For ever.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

ME AND MY SPOON

SALLY BERCOW

As the Speaker's wife do you have a large collection of spoons in your official residence?

Yes it's true, I spent a lot of my early days getting legless. I liked to drink buckets. So what?

I'm sorry, how do spoons come into this exactly?

And when I was really drunk I would go to bed with anyone who bought me a drink. I was a real slapper, I suppose you'd say.

Could we get back to the subject of spoons? You must do a great deal of entertaining as the Speaker's wife?

Oh, all right, there were drugs as well – weed mostly. I don't remember to be honest, I was so out of it...

So, er, do you have a favourite spoon?

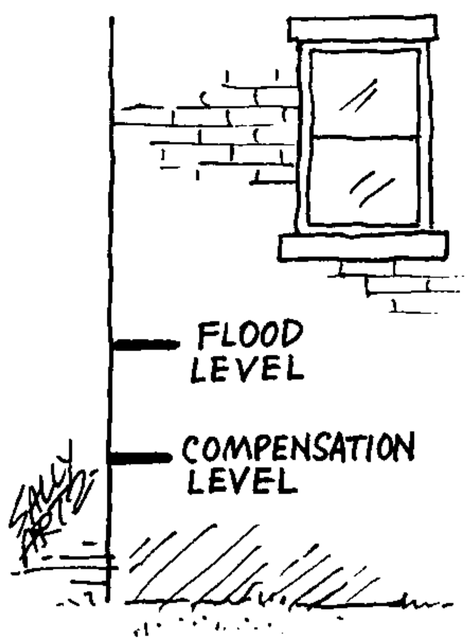
If I'm going to be a Labour MP and stop the evil Tories getting into power, I've got to be really honest and open.

So, has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I'm afraid I can't talk about that, it's a private matter. (*Pause*). Did I tell you about the bloke dressed up as a chicken? God, I was drunk that night.

I'm afraid that's all we have time for.

NEXT WEEK: *Katherine Rake, of the Family Parenting Institute, "Me And My Rake".*



"Oh no! It's our children back from university!"

CLIMATE CHANGE – IT'S REAL!

by Our Scientific Staff **Dee Nile**

MAKE no mistake, the climate is changing. Where once everyone accepted that the end of the world was coming, now the atmosphere is completely different. Levels of scepticism are rising and there have been floods of articles by Rod Liddle, Christopher Booker and Melanie Phillips which are threatening to swamp all the low-lying newspapers
(cont. p. 94)

IRAQ INQUIRY – DAY 94

'AMERICANS WERE GHASTLY,' CHILCOT TOLD

THE INQUIRY into the Iraq War yesterday heard evidence from Sir Mandarin Orange, the former private secretary to the private secretary to the Cabinet.

"Our American friends had very little idea of what they were doing," said Sir Mandarin.

"Very early on we told them that we knew all about how to handle these terrorist chaps because we'd done it before in Northern Ireland.

"But these frightful Americans didn't listen to us. No wonder it all went completely pear-shaped."

Meyer Culpa

The inquiry then heard from Sir Christopher Satsuma, former Ambassador to Washington, who said that he had written several times to the Prime Minister Tony Blair, telling him not to trust President Bush who, in his words, was "pretty ghastly" and "frightful".

"Now that Blair is out of power," Sir Christopher went on, "I can speak freely. I can tell you that I never rated him very highly, and incidentally all this is in my book *'Blair Was A Bastard'*, which is now on sale in all good bookshops".

The inquiry then heard from Sir Hector Tangerine, the former Deputy Head of MI6, who explained "We all knew that Saddam had no weapons of mass-destruction, but we thought that in the circumstances it would be much better not to tell anyone."

The inquiry continues.

Lord Mandelson In His New Green Wellies – How He Will Look

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD
ENGLAND HAVE GOT A GREAT DRAW...
WORLD CUP 2010
AND WITH OUR LADS PLAYING IN THE BEST LEAGUE IN THE WORLD THEY SHOULD HAVE ALL THE PREPARATION THEY NEED FOR NEXT SUMMER...
MAN CITY 2 CHELSEA 1
LAMPARD FAILS FROM THE PENALTY SPOT
EVERTON 2 SPURS 2
DEFOE HAS PENALTY SAVED!

TV THIS WEEK

BBC1 8pm Monday

Her Majesty

ZOE PRITCHETT plays the young Queen Elizabeth in furious conflict with Sir Winston Churchill (Miles Price) over the Mau Mau uprising. "I don't believe I'm hearing this," she tells the famous wartime premier.

BBC4 9pm Tuesday

Barbara

LOTTY WORSLEY plays the young Barbara Cartland and the author's darker side is revealed as we see her torrid affair with playwright Noel Coward (Mark Eastman). "You're doing my head in, Noely," she tells him.

Channel 4 10pm Wednesday

Myra

CAITLIN MACNAMARA plays the legendary concert pianist Dame Myra Hess as she battles with her demons of depression and drug addiction following the break up of her tragic relationship with ukulele star George Formby (Bradley Wilson). "I need some space, Myra ducks, for some me-time," George tells the distraught Myra.

BBC3 11.00pm Thursday

Margaret

EMILY KEITHLEY-STRIBBS plays the young Margaret Rutherford as the fledgling actress embarks on a lesbian relationship with Dame Agatha Christie (played by Enid Blyton). When Agatha cruelly rejects Margaret, the young Princess Elizabeth (Myra Hindley) intervenes to comfort her and asks Sir Winston Churchill (Noel Coward) to postpone his plans for World War Two. "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie. Come out, come out, come out," he tells Stalin.

(That's enough terrible biopics, Ed.)

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

1033 hrs Emergency call received from member of public to report suspicious person taking photographs of the sign above the hairdressing salon in Pricerite Road – The Cut Above. An armed response team was immediately dispatched to the scene of the crime, led by Det. Sgt. Moorgate. On arrival the suspect was identified as a Mr Barry Whittam-Smith, a retired gentleman who claimed that he had found the sign "amusing". When warned that he was committing an offence under Section 48 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2007, governing the making of photographic images of any building or other installation in public, Mr Whittam-Smith began to act in a highly suspicious manner by uttering the words "You must be joking". He then refused to give a blood sample or to give details of his ethnicity. He was tasered using the minimum strength of 50,000 volts and, due to an underlying medical condition, regrettably passed away before charges could be brought against him. No further action therefore needed to be taken.

1215 hrs Calls received from 59 members of the public reporting concern among residents of the Nelson Mandela housing estate, over a dangerous canine of unclassified breed being kept in proximity to under-age infants. No officers were available to investigate, owing to their attendance on a three-day training course on "Improving Relationships With The Muslim Community".

Let's Screwer Les Anglais!

(Surely 'Let's Parler Franglais')

Numero 94 A La Commission

Président Sarkozy *(pour c'est lui)*: Ha, ha, ha, ha. Vous avez marché straight dans notre trap, Monsieur Darling.

Chancellor Darling: Je ne sais pais qu'est-ce que you mean?

Sarko: Ha, ha, ha, loseurs! Vous thought que vous had won le top job avec Baroness Ashton. Quelle horreur! Oo-là-là, non merci, certainement pas.

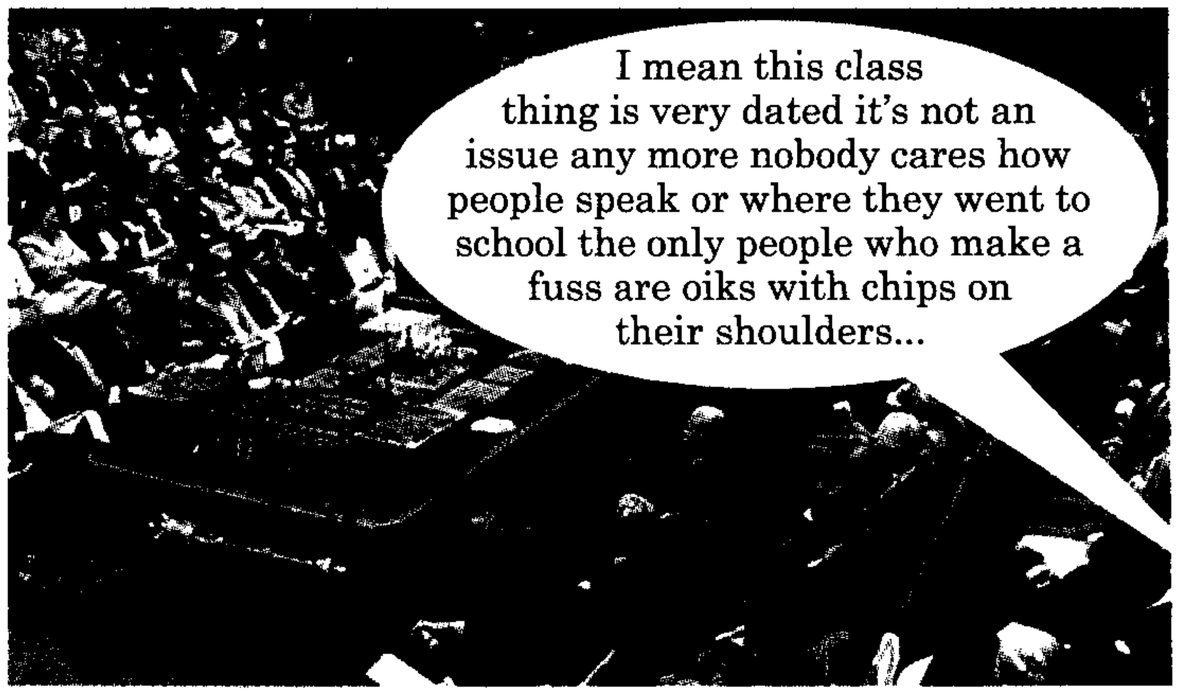
Darling : Je ne sais pas qu'est-ce que vous mean. Lady Ashton est une femme très capable, high-volante et un sauf pair de mains.

Sarko: Comme les rosbifs sont stupides! Personne donne un fig qui runner les foreign affairs. Maintenant, nous Français sont les top chiens en charge de finance. Alors, c'est curtains pour la cité de Londres et vos piss-pauvres banqueurs inutiles, comme Sir Fred le Shred.

Darling: Je don't believe que je suis hearing this.

Sarko: Nous even avons un French mot pour it: un fait accompli, ha, ha, ha, ha. Et maintenant, j'ai une petite foreign affaire de my own to attender to – et je ne mean pas Baroness Ashton!

© Le late Kilometres Kington.


I mean this class thing is very dated it's not an issue any more nobody cares how people speak or where they went to school the only people who make a fuss are oiks with chips on their shoulders...

DEFINING AZERBAIJANI FAIR TRADE

(formerly Drawing All Faiths Together)

Hello!

And there's only one thing on the global agenda this week – Formaldehyde! Yes, it's not something people talk about a lot nowadays – but hey, people are wrong with a capital W!!

I was recently privileged to be invited by President Baadman of Azerbaijan – one of the good guys! – to open a fantastic new state of the art formaldehyde factory in the beautiful unspoilt countryside just outside Szhithol on the banks of the River Poizzon – which the President tells me is the Riviera of tomorrow!. And look I'm not going to disagree with him – especially not now I've got my cheque for 50 million gromits and a free lifetime supply of formaldehyde!!!

My old friend, Cherie, once said to me, "Vicar, you can never have too much money or formaldehyde." And hey, isn't that something for us all to think about in this season of Advent/Eid/Diwali/Yuletide/Thetan Festival of the Second Coming of L. Ron Hubbard? Apart of course from thinking about formaldehyde!

Yours
Rev. T. Blair
Chief Executive, D.A.F.T.
(former vicar of St. Albion's)

"Get real, nobody pays for music these days"

WHITE HOUSE GATE-CRASHERS EXPOSED

by Our American Staff **Boy George Washington**

AN UNKNOWN British couple pulled off a daring coup, it has been revealed, by managing to gatecrash a party thrown by the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

They even had themselves photographed alongside the President and the First Lady, who chatted with them as if they were legitimate guests.

Watergatecrashers

"It was amazing," said Londoner Gordon Brown. "We got past the security and no one once questioned who we were.

"We had drinks and canapes and everything," went on his socialite wife Sarah. "They were really friendly and the President asked Gordon whether we were enjoying our time in America, before moving on to chat with a man who owns a potato farm in Idaho."

Red-faced FBI chiefs last night apologised for the severe security lapse, which had allowed two complete outsiders to get near to the President.

Gatecrashing bore

"It was a major blooper," said one senior White House protection officer. "This guy turned out to be a real loony-toon – thinks he's a Prime Minister or something. He even talks about having a 'special relationship' with the President – this is some dumb kook, I tell you."

● **Full story and pics p. 94**

TORIES SPLIT OVER WARMING

by Our Climate Change Staff **Al Bore**

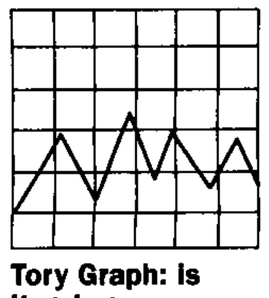
THE Conservative Party was split as never before yesterday, as leading figures clashed over whether things were hotting up for the Tories, as predicted by their own computer models.

David Cameron is insisting that things are "hotting up" for his Party, but others – pointing to recent polls – maintain that there is no evidence of the public warming to the Tories and that, in fact, the political climate is getting measurably cooler.

Said one expert climatologist, Professor Nigel Lawson, "Some polls show the Tories going north, others show them going south.

North and South Polls

"There is no consensus about what is going to happen in the future. The climate is totally unpredictable and could be influenced by the huge quantities of hot air emanating from Zac Goldsmith."



Tory Graph: Is it going up or down?

SUBO – THE FAIRY TALE COMES TRUE

by Our Showbiz Staff **Les Miserables**

WHO WOULD have believed it? A year ago it did not seem possible, but now it has become reality.

One individual dared to dream a dream – and that dream has come true.

Earning Difficulties

Simon Cowell, a little known international TV impressario believed that he could make a lot of money from an odd-looking woman from Scotland. And, incredibly he was to be proved right.

Simon's vision of standing on a big pile of money made by Subo came to pass just as he hoped.

Striking Boyle

"I had faith in myself," he told reporters, "The moment she opened her mouth I heard the most beautiful sound. It was the sound of cash tills ringing. I knew then that one day Subo would make me even richer than I am already."

The TV celebrity and record producer concluded, "I've been on an amazing journey to the bank."

Judge Hits Back At Press Critics

by Our Legal Staff **JOSHUA ROSENBERG**

A SENIOR High Court Judge, Mr Justice Cockleady, last night hit out at journalists who dared to criticise his role in a number of recent high-profile libel actions.

"Any suggestion that I am in some way biased against the press," said the judge, "is a disgraceful slur which I consider to be tantamount to the offence of criminal libel, or *scandalum magnatum*, to give it its full legal nomenclature.

"Any journalist who is in any way guilty of being personally abusive of myself shall be taken from this court and hanged by the neck until he has apologised."

Mr Justice Eady is 106.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

HOW DARE THEY SAY WE ARE ALL OLD ETONIANS!?!
SNOOTY TOWERS
SOME OF US WENT TO ST PAUL'S, DON'TCHAKNOW!
'SNOOTY'S LOT ARE SNOOTY' - SHOCK CLAIM
IT'S THE OLD SCHOOL LIE!
GORDON SAYS IT'S ALL ABOUT CLASS
HOW WOULD HE KNOW? HE HASN'T GOT ANY!
THEY DON'T KNOW THEIR CLASS FROM THEIR ELBOW!
IT'S AN OUTRAGEOUS CLAIM!
BIT LIKE YOURS FOR CHOCOLATE, EH, DAVE?
CARAMEL TOFF-EE HOUSE
TALK ABOUT A MINTED AERO-STOCRAT, EH, READERS?
'APPEN - CHOCOLATE IS BAD FOR YOU!!!

WAR CRIMINAL TOO ILL TO FACE TRIAL

by Our War Crimes Staff **Lunchtime O'Bower**

A LONDON inquiry was yesterday the scene of a macabre spectacle when an accused war criminal was wheeled in on a trolley, claiming that he was too ill to speak.

"Hey, guys," he addressed the courtroom from his recumbent position, "I'd love to help out with your inquiry into the Iraq War, but I have suddenly been overcome by such a severe illness that I am physically incapable of testifying."

The tribunal chairman, Lord Didcot of Parkway, expressed his deepest sympathy with the accused, his old friend Tony Blair.

"The question to which this court demands an answer, Mr Blair, is whether you would like to go home to recover from this ordeal.

"I am sure," he went on severely, "that we could arrange an ambulance for you, to take you to lunch.

"Which reminds me," the learned chairman concluded, "I

see that it is 12 o'clock and time for an adjournment for us all to go off to the Reform Club for luncheon."

That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS SIR TERREIUS LEAHIUS PRINCEPS EXECUTIVUS 'TESCO' POPULARISSIMUS VENDOR ALIMENTI PAUPERRI E.G. TESCOS VALUE PANIS ET TESCOS VALUE PIZZA ET TESCOS VALUE FINANCIUM ET CETERA ET CETERA AD NAUSEAM (CUM MAJOR EXPENDITURE EST POSSIBILE ACQUIRERE 'TESCOS BONISSIMUS') TESCOS ATQUE VENDET VINUM VILUM ET GROSSIMUS ET MULTI CRITICI DICUNT UT TESCOS RESPONSIBLE EST CUM 'BIBULUM BINGUM' EVENIET TESCOS PROSPERITAS INCREDIBILIS EST EXTENDIT PER OMNIA BRITANNIA ET NUNC UNUM PUNDUM STERLING IN OCTO EST CONSUMPTUS IN TESCO (UT TESCOS DICAT 'OMNIS PARVUM IUVAT') MOX TOTUM UNIVERSUM ERIT PROXIME TESCO BRITANNIA ERAT VERDANS ET DULCIS SED CUM TESCOS ET SUA MULTI NOVUM ARBORI MOX FIT CONCRETUS ET MAXIME CONVENIENT QUOD SUNT APERTUS XXIV HORAE PRO DIEM, SETPEM DIES PRO SEPTEM DIES. CUM TEENAGER ERAT SIR TERREIUS LABORAVIT QUALITER STACKOR SHELVII NUNC EST DUX TOTO CONSORTIO ET PROINDE GAUDEAMUS IGITUR!

© University of Hertfordshire (formerly the Hatfield Polytechnic)

UK GOLD

Columbo – Episode 94

The Case Of The Gentlemen's Club

(Silly music. Luxurious residence in downtown Florida. Shabby car draws up outside and man in raincoat with cigar climbs out and rings bell)

Butler: Can I help you, sir?

Columbo: I am Lieutenant Columbo of the Los Angeles Police Department. *(Surely Florida? Ed.)* I was hoping to speak to Mr Woods.

Butler: You and a million others, sir.

(Cut to palatial interior with marble pillars and Rembrandts on the wall. The world's most famous golfer is practising his putting on the carpet)

Columbo: Say, this is quite a place you got here, sir. And may I ask where you got this carpet? You know, Mrs Columbo is a great admirer of your game. She watches all your tournaments on TV.

Woods: Is there some point to this, Lieutenant? I am a very busy man, trying to avoid talking to the police.

Columbo: It's just when I came in, sir, I couldn't help noticing the car in the drive. It looks all smashed up, as though the driver had hit a fire hydrant. Have you any explanation for that, sir?

Woods: There could be any number of explanations. The driver could have been under a lot of stress.

Columbo *(slaps forehead)*: That's it, sir, obviously. Stress! Now it begins to make sense. *(Relights cigar and prepares to leave)* Oh, there's just one

more thing, sir...

Woods: Yes?

Columbo: The back window of the car... it looks as though a woman smashed it in with a golf club. Maybe it was his wife after an argument about a nightclub hostess or something... That's a beautiful picture, sir. Is it your wife? Or maybe it's your girlfriend...?

Woods: You'd better have something to back that up, Columbo, or you'll be looking for a new job. I think you should leave.

Columbo: I'm sorry, sir. I was just leaving. I think I've got everything I want.

(Columbo leaves room. Woods sighs with relief and begins to phone girlfriend. Columbo re-enters)

Columbo: Just one more thing...

(Woods breaks down in tears)

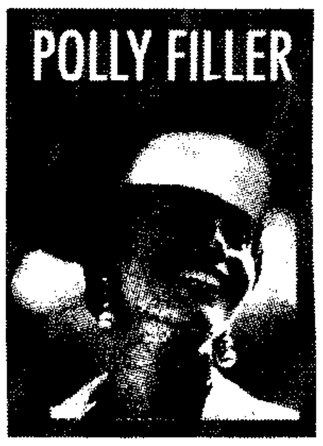
Woods: I confess... I have transgressed... I have sinned against my family... But, Lieutenant, how on earth did you find out?

Columbo: I read it all in the newspapers, sir, and very interesting it was too.

(Silly music. Titles. End)

Great Military Operations

No. 94 The Surge of the Light Brigade



PHEW! That's it! It's all done. Time to put my feet up and pour myself a well-earned glass of Chardonnay! Because all my Christmas shopping has been done! And it's only December 4th!

Now, I know some of you will be a mite jealous(!!), as you contemplate the living hell that is Oxford Street at Christmas, battering your way through crowds to buy that elusive Transformers 2 Bumblebee Helmet for the toddler and that already sold-out Top Gear Best Faked Explosions Ever Volume 6 DVD for your Useless Partner!!

But that's your problem! I've managed to get **all** the shopping done without a single blister or an elbow in the ribs from a fat woman from Guildford who has come up to see the lights!!

AH! I know what you are thinking. Clever old Polly has done it all on-line!

But you're wrong! I've been even cleverer than that – because you can't trust the combined incompetence of Lost Up The Amazon and The Royal Fail (as I call them in my new book *'The Ultimate Stocking Filler – The Xmas Polly Filler Compendium'*, Johnson & Pearson £15.99).

No. So, what's my secret? Simple. I got the au pair to do it! Christmas sorted – and all thanks to Slavlaba from the Ukraine!

And, best of all, I'm now free to concentrate on telling the stupid girl to get on with cooking the Christmas Dinner!

Seasons Gloatings!

Polly

Gospel According to St Matthew (Parris)

(Modernised Version)

The Story of Zacchaeus

1 And there was a rich young man called Zacchaeus, who was known as Zac. And he yearned to become a faithful follower of the Promised Messiah, that was David, son of Cameron.

2 And Zac went up into a tree, to show how Green he was, to await the coming of his leader.

3 But then Zac was sore troubled, for he remembereth that he was a non-dom, which in his language meaneth one who avoideth paying taxes.

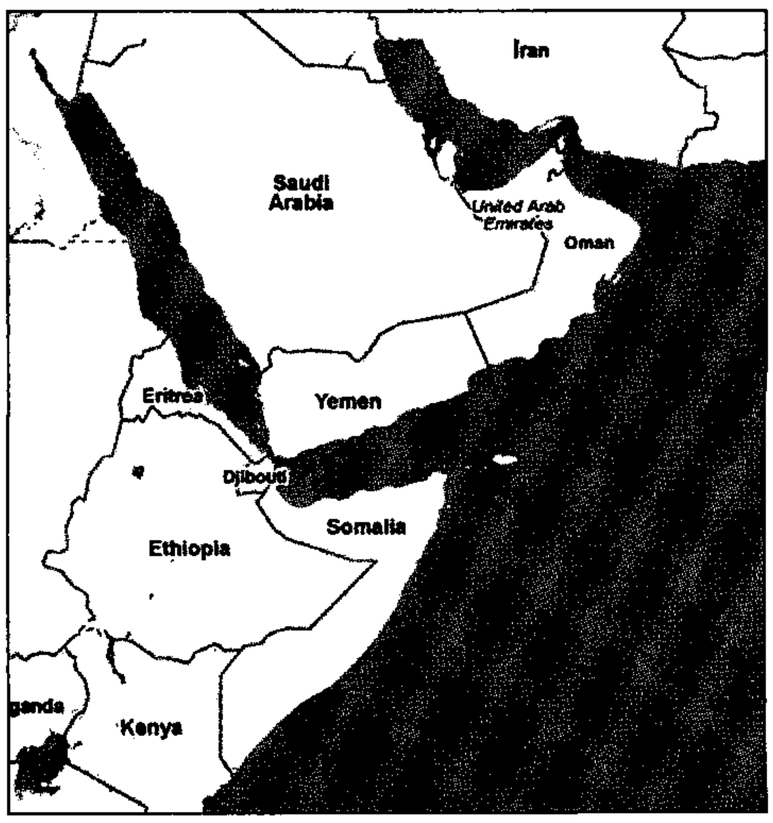
4 However, David cometh to the tree and shouteth up, "Zac, Zac, come down from the tree, for I haveth a solution to the problem of you being a tax avoider.

5 "I tell you it is easier for a rich man to get into Parliament if he remaineth in the country and payeth his taxes."

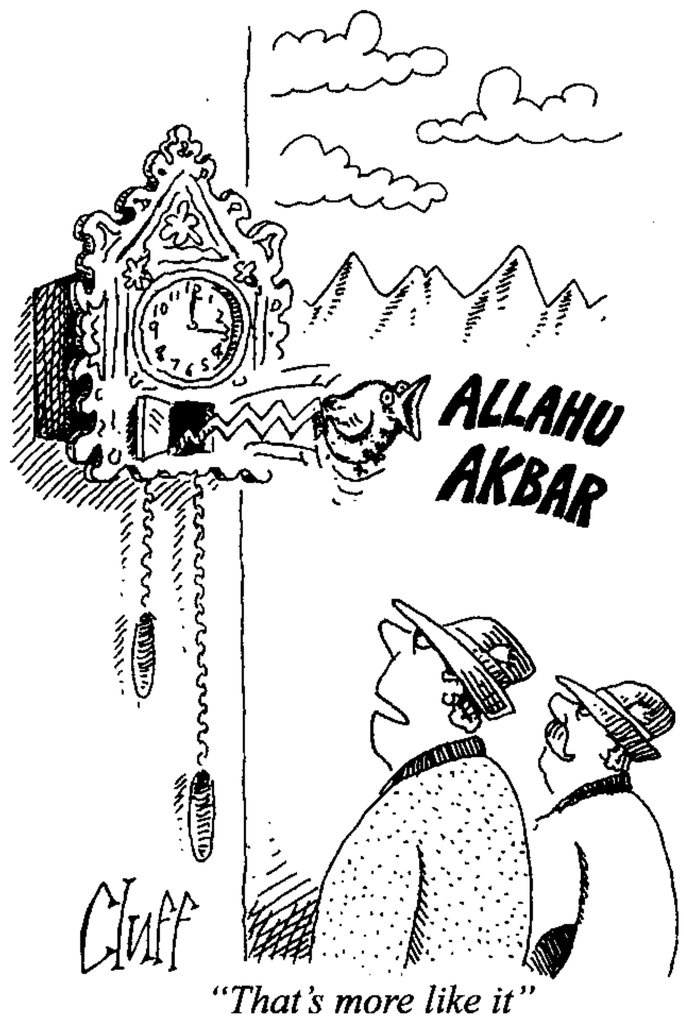
6 And Zac jumpeth down from the tree, crying out, "Whatever thou sayest is right, Dave – we Etonites must stick together."

7 And they went on their way rejoicing.

THAT HIGH-RISK MIDDLE-EAST SEA AREA IN FULL



High-risk sea areas are in blue



"That's more like it"

News In Brief

RBS BOARD 'THREATENS NOT TO QUIT'

THE RBS Board last night threatened not to quit after the Government demanded control of how much bonuses the bank paid staff.

"We are seriously threatening to stay in our cushy overpaid jobs for the foreseeable future," said one unnamed board member, carrying a wheelbarrow of cash from the firm's head office.

"Alistair Darling doesn't realise how much damage we can do to the British economy by staying in these jobs."

The Government played down the threats that the board wouldn't resign, saying it had already lined up Sir Fred Goodwin to take charge once again at a moment's notice.

CARE HOME SHOCK

THE Care Commission has released a scathing report which reveals that thousands of frail, sick elderly people are being cared for by poorly trained staff in filthy, squalid care homes.

"These vulnerable sick old people should of course be being cared for by highly trained staff in filthy squalid NHS wards," said a Care Commission *(cont p. 94)*

CAMERON APOLOGISES

DAVID CAMERON was forced to apologise last night, after getting his facts wrong over two schools he'd claimed had links to Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir .

"I now accept that my accusations against 'St David in the Wold' in the rural hamlet of Quaint in Buckinghamshire and 'St Bartholomew the Righteous' in the village of Twee in Shropshire, were wrong and that they have no links to extremist terrorist organisations."

Late News

- Cameron Throws Egg At Own Face

New Words

with Philip Howard

Aspiration, noun. Political target known to be unachievable but promised anyway. Example: "When I said I would abolish the congestion charge, this was an aspiration," Mayor of London, 2009.

Inquiry, noun. Semi-legal process involving taking notes and making statements which can later be filed and forgotten about – e.g. Hutton Inquiry, Butler Inquiry, Chilcot Inquiry.

Underperforming, adj. Euphemistic term for NHS hospital found to be unsatisfactory. Synonym for "Highly dangerous, toxic, lethal".

DIARY

With Christmas fast approaching, we are all asking ourselves, "What is holiday spirit?"

For me, holiday spirit is a feeling of warmth, of togetherness, of connectedness. We get that by buying things. That is why "God", "All-Seeing", "Inner Eye", "Om", "Buddha", "Big Buddy" – call him or her (or both) what you will – gave us all these beautiful neighbourhood stores, and, more recently, offered us the candid spiritual privilege of instant personal renewal by shopping online

This season, this planet of ours – I call her Mother Earth – needs some cosseting. She deserves it! She's given so much to us. So now let's give something back to her.

Let's tell her to lie back, put up her feet and stop making those harmful emissions.

To help me in my quest, this year I am asking my very dear personal present-buyer Justin to scout around for some very special items. These gifts will make much-loved cheeks flush with color when they are opened. And once in the hands they will convey the message: I know you, I get you, I see you.

I would love to share with you Justin's findings. If you don't have time to buy these beautiful things, why not ask your own personal present-buyer to do it for you? Some of these tips come from my good friend Ethan Hawke's personal present-buyer Mambo, who is just as delighted as I am to share them with you.

The Stella McCartney Eco Collection

Around this time of year, I always leave my comfort zone to re-read the great Russian novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoievsky.

It's a great way to remind ourselves just how lucky we are compared to poor Raskolnikov!

If only the hero of that insightful book had been able to draw some precious rays of sunshine into his life with items from Stella's new Eco Collection, he'd never have got himself into such a negative head-space. For me, Stella's capsule collection of beautiful, body-friendly clothes made from 100% organic cotton and recycled materials spells pure sustainable pleasure.

If Raskolnikov had owned her gorgeous new organic nylon hobo bag with zippered expandable sides and interior zippered pocket ($695 from Macy's) then I doubt he'd have wanted to kill that poor old lady! Likewise, if the old lady (to me age is irrelevant, it's the inner person that counts) had been able to switch those mouldy old hand-me-downs for something as modern yet timeless as Stella's Stretch Cotton Sequin All In One with

GWYNETH PALTROW

adjustable tie waist and racer back ($1,595), with an added Silk Cotton Slub Camel Jacket ($2,045) to complete the look then she would have felt more empowered, her karma would have improved, and she would have shaken off all those outdated notions of victimhood.

Ultra-Pure Alkaline Drinking Water System

It's easy to forget what a truly wonderful drink water is. Whether you are my good friend Madonna or just an ordinary person – and I believe nobody to be ordinary, each one of us is very special – water has much to offer. It may be simple, but it is also democratic and beautifully clear – and it's great for quenching thirst! Try! Whenever, I'm thirsty, I drink a glass of water. That's a life-lesson I'm overjoyed to be sharing with you. And if we can teach the unfortunate people of Africa to drink a glass of water whenever they feel thirsty then we will all be doing our bit to help ease their pain.

For me, a glass of cool, refreshing water is the best present anyone can give. I had one yesterday with Cameron Diaz. We enjoyed it together, and, on some deeper level, I think it enjoyed us. But if you want to take your drinking water experience to the next level, you should install the Ultra-Pure Alkaline Drinking System ($900 exclusive of installation) in your home. It filters the water through nine stages to bring you water that balances your pH, readjusts your feng shui, reaffirms your inner self and provides tons of minerals not found in poor people's water. Does that make me feel bad about myself? No. The way I see it is this. The more Ultra-Pure Alkaline Drinking System water I imbibe, then the more Earth I can save and the more I am helping the poor through my example.

Note to self. It's a liberating feeling to step outside our comfort zone, giving more than we think we can afford to help people who don't have it as good as we do.

Tom Ford Personal Snowman Maker

I love to build a snowman. The absolute best way to build a snowman is out of snow, so it is best to pick your time of year with care. Snow in the summer is rare, unless you are somewhere snowy.

These beautiful snow-based figures we call Snowmen put us in touch with our creativity, and remind us that though some of our fellow human beings may not not be blessed with legs, they are still able to rejoice in their own identities and to live richly satisfying lives, at least until they melt.

In these hectic, recessiony days, few us can find the time to build our own snowman. My good friend the internationally-acclaimed designer Tom Ford has come up with a fine solution: The Tom Ford Personal Snowman Maker ($3,450 from Macy's, snow extra). This must-have invention will construct an instant snowman on your behalf (8 different designs available, among them a profound Rothko snowman in deep reds and blacks, and a moving and inspirational Third World snowman). It takes just thirty minutes for your snowman to be ready for everyone to admire, saving you precious time for personal growth and/or investment renewal.

Your kids may find the snow unpleasantly cold to the touch. So remember to make space under your family Xmas tree for The Tom Ford Junior Personal Snowman Maker ($4600).

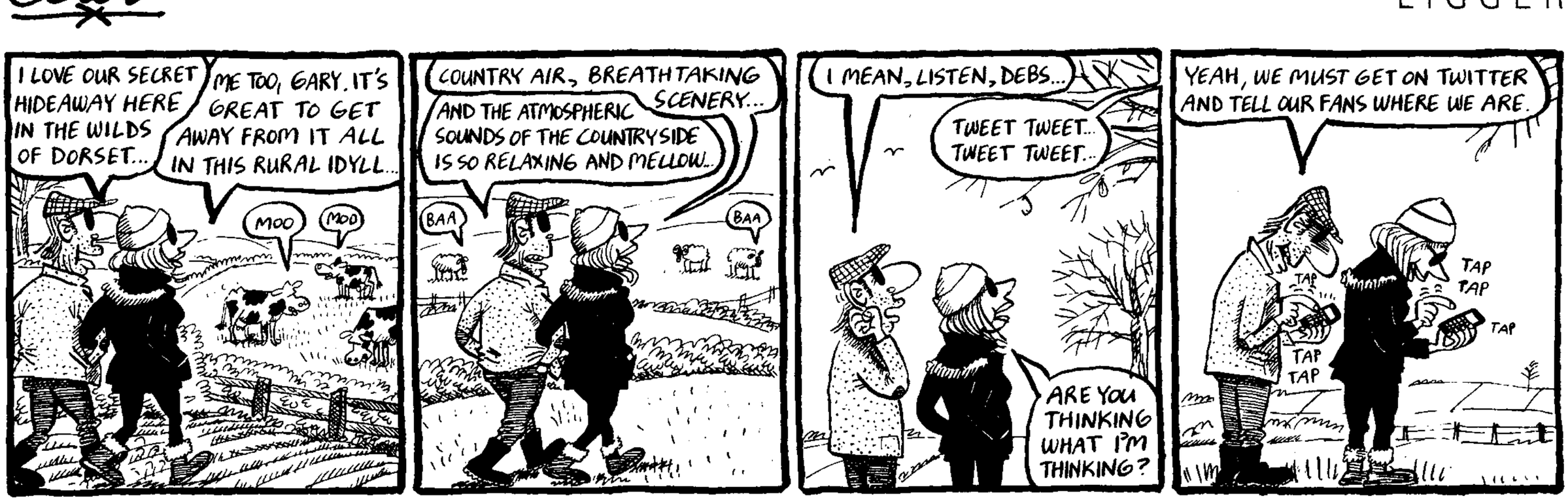
So many great gift ideas! We are living in exciting times. We are confronted with the challenge of sustaining our food, our water and our environment. It is up to each one of us, Mother Earth's wayward children, to buy as many gifts as we can for those we love, such as my good friends divine songstress Norah Jones and leading filmmaker Sam Mendes. The more we buy, the better off we will be, and the more those less fortunate than us will benefit. All human beings, particularly the poor and downtrodden, love to see others enriching their own lives. Yup. It's a win-win.

love,

Gwyneth xx

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


I LOVE OUR SECRET HIDEAWAY HERE IN THE WILDS OF DORSET...
ME TOO, GARY. IT'S GREAT TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL IN THIS RURAL IDYLL...
MOO
MOO
COUNTRY AIR, BREATHTAKING SCENERY...
AND THE ATMOSPHERIC SOUNDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE IS SO RELAXING AND MELLOW...
BAA
BAA
I MEAN, LISTEN, DEBS...
TWEET TWEET... TWEET TWEET...
ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING?
YEAH, WE MUST GET ON TWITTER AND TELL OUR FANS WHERE WE ARE.
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP

Literary Review

Money for old soap

Meltdown
Ben Elton
(Bantam Press, £18.99)

UNDERSTATEMENT has never been Ben Elton's forte. In this, his 13th novel in 20 years, he tackles the global recession head on, with guns blazing, trumpets blaring and adverbs primed and ready to go. When reading it, you'd swear blind that the book keeps leaping up of its own accord and slapping you on the forehead. Just in case you don't get the message, the back cover has a photograph of ten-pound notes falling through the air. (Although you'll look in vain for the caption "From author's own collection".)

Jimmy Corby is the hero, or anti-hero, or somewhere in between. He and his helpfully close-knit group of friends graduate from Sussex in the mid-1990s, and quickly become rich and successful. Lizzie starts a company that makes well-packaged nothings for inflated prices. David trains as an architect and is soon designing huge corporate structures for nasty banks. Henry becomes a Labour MP. Rupert, who isn't as posh as he pretends to be but is every bit as right-wing, goes into banking, and Jimmy himself, despite being a beery know-nothing, becomes a stockbroker and the richest of them all.

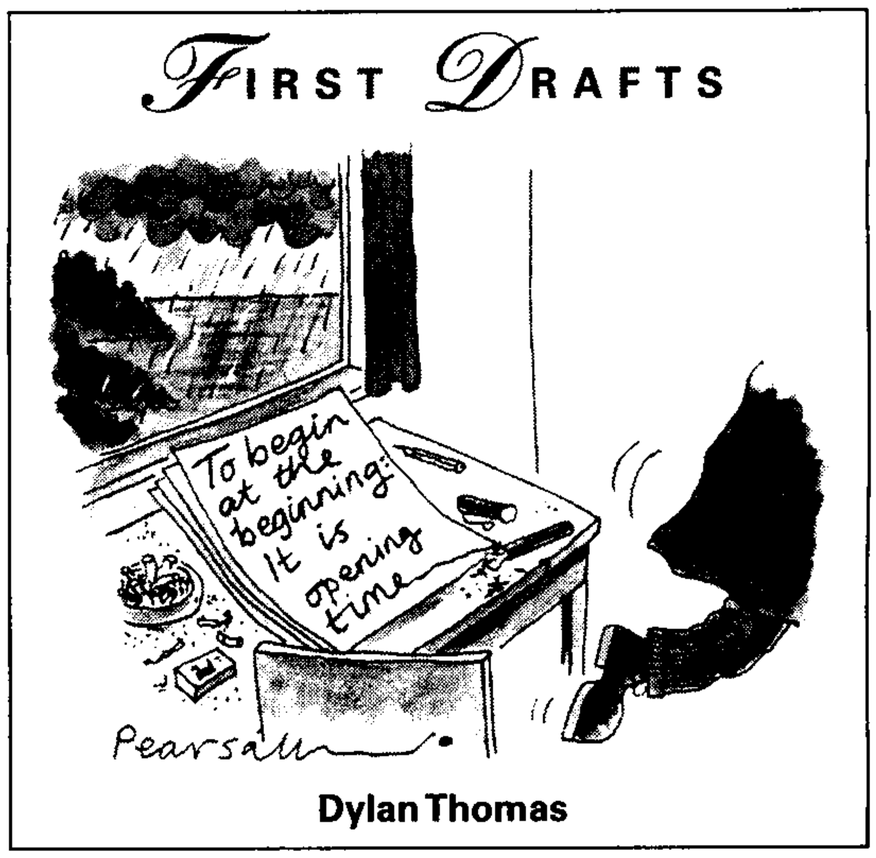
Their career paths are effortless. They don't have particularly good contacts, minds or skills, but Elton says that anyone in the 90s could make an instant fortune and so that's the way it must be. Besides, the vaster the hubris, the more devastating the nemesis. Suddenly the bubble bursts, everybody is financially extended far beyond good sense, and lives are crushed by circumstance and idiocy. It's a morality tale for the moment, or at least, it would be if you believed a single word of it.

The characters don't help. Are we supposed to like them or wish them dead? Jimmy is thinking of getting his fifth tattoo, and reminisces fondly of "enjoying his second straight dawn, loved up on a beach in Ibiza with a bottle of Krug between his knees and a gap-year holiday-hippy chick on either side." So that answers that question. "David was the arty member of the gang. In the great Brit pop battle of '94 he had been the only firm Blur man. Jimmy, Rupert and Robbo had all been 100 percent Oasis..." If this sounds a little like your dad "getting down with ver kids", then so does the rest of the book. "'What kind of a twat would I have looked trying to get off with a uber-babe like you?' Robson protested", as well he might. "Lots of guys from his uni were now independent film producers..." They were? Oh yes, everyone was in the mid-90s. There's even a chapter called "Money is the new Rock 'n' Roll".

But let's be fair: Elton writes to headlines and he has to get the book out quickly. Research may not be a priority. Early on in the piece Jimmy has breakfast with his wife Monica on a school day as one of their nannying staff prepares to take their son to his prep school in the 4x4. Ever heard of a trader who was still at home at 8.30 munching toast? Jimmy tells Monica that he has saved packets by selling his "Caledonian Granite" shares a day before they crashed, thanks to a whisper he had heard. That's insider trading, says Monica. Jimmy doesn't agree. "'I mean, it's just like gossip, isn't it? A tip at the races or something like that.'" So he has been working in the City for 15 years and he's not sure what insider trading might be? That's like a jockey wondering what a horse is.

It transpires that we are supposed to sympathise with Jimmy, if only because he knows he has been incredibly lucky and doesn't deserve his great riches. The person you actually sympathise with is Jimmy's father, an old school provincial bank manager who regards the arrogance and greed of the new bankers with horror. And the most interesting scenes are the political arguments between horrible right-wing Rupert and fluffy MP Henry. Elsewhere Elton wants you to know that he's still on the side of the (left-wing) angels, but he always gives Rupert the best lines and the most convincing arguments. You get the impression he really enjoys writing Rupert, maybe a little too much...

The most telling scene, though, comes about halfway through, when Jimmy is called in by his son's headmaster and told that the boy must leave the school because of unpaid fees. The stuffy establishment figure, the weary dialogue, the emotional manipulation... it's like watching *EastEnders*. You realise that Elton isn't writing satire, he's writing soap. Most striking of all is the complete absence of anything resembling humour. What a long road it has been for Ben Elton from *The Young Ones* and *Blackadder*, and how many of us wish he had taken almost any other.



WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays
Zadie Smith
(Hamish Hamilton £20)

From "Striking it Lucky", a lecture given to a select audience of supporters from the staff of the Guardian Saturday Review.

IT's such a confidence trick, writing a novel. I've managed it three times now. The main person you have to trick is your publisher. This is hard to do alone. So I gather sentences around me, the literary equivalent of a praetorian guard. For five years I had a line from E.M. Forster stuck to my door: "A novel is of course the sum of its accumulated sentences, but it is something more than that. It is, let us say, a conversation of silences, a collision of bright air, a realism of the spectral, a defiant seizing of the unseen by hands that may not even exist."

Half-a-decade later I confess myself slightly taken aback by the rapt, unleavened autonomy that this implies. But that's how it goes. You get the drift? Other people's words are so important. Other people's words are the conveyor belt on which the novel, that awful, terrible, unyielding, phantasmal thing, slides proudly into eternity. Recently, though, I came across a new quote. It's a thought of Nietzsche's and very simple: "He digs deepest who deepest digs."

Which is to say: enough of surfaces, of brazen exfoliations, clutter, wrack and ornament. Let us have the courage, as Nabokov, Gaddis, Tolstoy and Barthes had before us, to admit that a spade is a large blunt instrument used in the reconfiguration of decayed plant matter. Think also of that stunning revelation that the editor of the *Bookseller* put into the mouth of his head reporter when he first received the publicity material for *White Teeth*: "This foxy black chick is really going to clean up."

The term *role model* is odious. As... (*consults sheaf of old college notes*)... Paul de Man once put it: "The consolation of that unchallenged, second self is the soul's essentialist treachery. Yet it ignores the truer challenge of art's incontestable reality." This is really very profound. Although Tolstoy is quite profound, too. On the other hand, most writers always have a model somewhere in mind. I always liked the ones in *Vogue*. And always I think of Keats. Raving Johnny Keats, like me come from the wrong side of the cultural tracks, Johnny Keats, slogging away in his Willesden lounge (*is this right? Ed.*), wearing his harem pants, listening to EMF's "Unbelievable", going to Cambridge, impersonating, adapting, struggling, growing, weeping, yelling, devising an oh-so complex aesthetic which, in its highbrow affiliations and its urgent demotic buzz, the media of his day found altogether irresistible.

Also included in this collection:

"Why George Eliot is really frightfully good", p31

"Why E.M. Forster is really frightfully good too", p68

"How I watched loads of terrible films for the Sunday Telegraph", p94

(*continues*)

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
AFTER CHRISTMAS, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE LEFTOVERS?
DELIA SMITH'S CHRISTMAS
TURN THEM INTO ANOTHER CHRISTMAS RECIPE BOOK!
Delia's
HAPPY CHRISTMAS

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ SO. Farewell then, Borders...? Short of an appearance by a last-minute saviour, the chain is entering its final days following its lapse into administration in November.

Back in July, when Borders CEO Philip Downer staged a management buyout, his talk was of the deal "securing the future" and "strengthening our unique position in the UK book market". But, just over four months later, the fact that stores are being stripped bare as customers swoop at closing-down sales shouldn't come as a surprise, given the buyout's financial backing came from Valco, the private-equity arm of failing company *specialist Hilco, which* has administered the last rites to many a business.

Demoralised staff, now facing statutory minimum redundancy terms, must wonder whether Downer's exit strategy will prove to be more profitable, at least for him, than many of his other decisions were for the chain.

Meanwhile, some publishers wonder if this sorry story would be happening at all if Borders' old respected CEO, David Roche, hadn't left two years ago following what are believed to be disagreements over its future direction with then owner Luke Johnson. The success of the Johnson/Downer approach is at least reflected in the closing-down sale, where you can pick up jewellery boxes, pottery and toys for up to 50 percent off, in addition to other less essential items like... books.

■ IF A bomb had dropped on the Wallace Collection last Tuesday, it would have taken out a sizeable chunk of London publishing, as well as the CEO of Pearson plc, Dame Marjorie Scardino.

The occasion was a celebration of the publishing career of Helen Fraser, MD of *Penguin* these past 13 years, who's loved, respected, etc., etc. – and only occasionally feared.

"It's Penguin's guilt party," quipped one well-known agent, referring to the fact that the host for the evening, John Makinson, CEO and chairman, a man whose favourite word is the personal pronoun, was the one who'd shown Fraser the door. She'd be 60 at the end of the year, he announced in July, and wished to retire to make way for younger blood. Oh and by the way, Penguin would be reducing its staff by 10 percent. Makinson himself is scarcely any younger, and Marj has long had a bus pass (or she would if she didn't have a chauffeur).

Fraser, a bluestocking who commissioned first books by Hermione Lee and Simon Schama among others but can handle Jackie Collins and Madonna when she has to, has been smiling and gracious throughout, talking proudly of the young people she'd trained and nurtured, and how right it was that one of them, Tom Weldon, should take over from her in this age of digital complexity.

Even so, there have been malicious mutterings that retirement was forced upon Fraser, who in January begins a new life as head of the Girls' Day School Trust (she will also sit on the board of publisher Frances Lincoln). A promotion for Weldon, who noted at the party that "Helen changed my life – I owe her everything", would ensure that there is no danger of the departure of Jamie Oliver and Jeremy Clarkson, two of Penguin's cash cows and the only successful authors that anyone can readily associate with Weldon.

All of which would, according to the cynics, explain a) the in-house movie in which staff and authors paid tribute to Fraser and b) Makinson's speech, which was so fulsome it begged the question why he hadn't persuaded her to stay on. "We love you," he declared.

Makinson was especially praising of her efforts a few years back when the new Penguin warehouse went into meltdown. Its systems had never been tested because the project – naturally – ran behind schedule and Penguin stood to pay a £2m forfeit if it didn't vacate Harmondsworth on cue. Fraser – and indeed Weldon – warned of impending disaster but no one listened. For weeks, books simply didn't make it into bookshops. The trade – authors, agents, booksellers – were furious and Fraser took the flak while the suits who'd driven the project, including the Penguin CEO, hid. The debacle cost the company untold millions.

Post-feminist magic

■ MEANWHILE, it emerges that Louise Moore, MD of Michael Joseph and another Fraser protégée all but joined at the hip to Weldon, was recently offered a job.

She told an agent she couldn't *possibly* take it – Macmillan didn't offer a clothes allowance. Then again, it's not so surprising: Makinson has a barber visit him in his office, though there are several conveniently located salons with a stone's throw of Penguin's Strand HQ.

■ ANTHONY CHEETHAM is at it again. Scarcely has he got his feet under the table at Atlantic than he's bought yet another book from his wife, agent Georgina Capel, to whom Quercus, where Cheetham worked until February this year, has already paid more than £1m in commission.

The book this time is "an international sensation", *Gold Mountain Blues*, an "epic" Chinese-Canadian novel by one Zhang Ling. Capel was acting on behalf of a New York agent and many London editors were surprised not to have been sent the novel for consideration. Nothing like keeping it in the family, of course...

'Bookworm'

MODESTY BLAZE

"You are very lucky to be able to play a great human being who had qualities that are perhaps greater than you have yourself." – Ben Whishaw *on playing John Keats, the Age (Australia), 29 November*

"Fame and its fans are strange bedfellows. When my postbox was shot at, I kept wailing 'Why me?' and thinking about John Lennon, a man killed simply for being a genius." – *Liz Jones, Daily Mail*

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE Wirral council chiefs who decided to close 11 libraries at once didn't even know what services the libraries provided, says the official inquiry into the fiasco (*Eyes passim*).

Sue Charteris, a former council chief executive turned public policy consultant, reported to culture secretary Andy Burnham that those making the decisions lacked "a clear understanding of the extent and range of services" offered by their own libraries and that their "approach focused specifically on the issue of asset management and cost savings".

Charteris's report found that Wirral had failed in its statutory duties to children, to disabled people, older people, deprived communities and adults. So, er, everyone then. The closure plans were withdrawn and Charteris wants Wirral to be obliged to produce a proper library strategy within six months.

Meanwhile a leaked report in Northumberland last month shows that six small branch libraries in the county face the chop to save just £28,000.

Pseuds Corner

The 'World of Warcraft' video game is every bit as glorious as Chartres Cathedral.

SAM LEITH, *Guardian G2*

For Zadie Smith, criticism is a bodily pleasure, not an abstracted mental operation. Reading, like eating, caters to her ravenous but discriminating appetite: she finds the essence of Kafka in a sliver of words from his diary, carved, she says, as thin as Parma ham and containing the creator's 'marbled mark.' She doesn't need a snack when watching a film, because her eyes are feeding on the images: Brief Encounter is, for her, a chunk of Wensleydale cheese, inimitably English. The critical arguments in which Smith engages are as vital and as potentially violent as sexual wrestling matches, and in an essay on Katherine Hepburn she recalls that she ejected two lovers from her bed – on separate occasions, I should explain – because they disagreed with her about the relationship between Hepburn and Spencer Tracey in *Adam's Rib*.

PETER CONRAD reviews Zadie Smith's collection of essays *Changing My Mind, Observer*

My style is traditional 'bourgeois homeless', with a bit of boy. [Vintage belted tunic, £250, Mairead Lewin. Wool trousers £135, LK Bennett. Shoes £275, Michael Lewis, at Dover Street Market. Earrings £330, Erickson Beamon.]

VALENTINE FILLOL-CORDIER, *Vogue*

A friend of mine asked me, 'What do you hope people will say about Twitter in five or 10 years?' and my answer to him, which I was surprised to hear myself say, was that I hope people will not consider Twitter a triumph of technology, instead that they will consider it a triumph of humanity.

Twitter co-founder BIZ STONE, *Guardian*

Everybody that knows me knows that I grab life and live it with a furious poetic intensity.

WILL SELF, *Observer Magazine*

I have a broken wrist in a sling and am looking for a stylish cape to get me through the next two months. I am willing to spend up to £350. Can you help?

From the 'Wardrobe Mistress' column, *Sunday Times Style Section*

CONTRIBUTORS: Strobes, Robert Matthews (and several others), Lucy Mitchell, David McAndrews, Anon, Martin Hemming

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CUMBRIA FLOODS

Reservoir of doubt

AS THE flood waters receded in Cumbria, environment minister Lord Davies of Oldham showered praise on the utility companies for responding "to the crisis with prompt and effective action in so many cases". But locals are questioning the role of United Utilities in keeping Thirlmere reservoir (pictured), which supplies water to Manchester, brim-full since the end of August.

Their concerns were raised in the House of Lords last week by Lord Campbell-Savours. The former MP for the constituency covering Workington, Keswick and Cockermouth called for "an end to United Utilities resisting reductions in water levels on the dam in high rainfall periods". He says locals are "fed up with the dithering of United Utilities, which defends the Thirlmere water assets for its shareholders while it is the people of Keswick and west Cumbria who are paying the price."

Campbell-Savours has been campaigning for several years to persuade the water company to reduce levels in Thirlmere during the winter to create spare capacity in the reservoir when flood warnings are issued. He told *Private Eye*: "Thirlmere is at the very heart of the matter. We have a mountain of correspondence with United Utilities about Thirlmere."

The Environment Agency confirmed that it had an arrangement with the company to allow the lake to remain a metre from full in readiness for floods. And a spokesman for United said that "daily management at Thirlmere has been in line with the agreed procedure during this exceptionally challenging period."

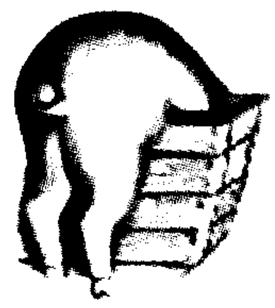
But locals say the company could have done more. "If they had opened the sluice gates and let water out earlier then it would have had capacity to take some of the flood water when we needed it to," says Cumbria county councillor Eric Nicholson, who condemns the water hoarding as "pure greed".

Campbell-Savours believes the water levels stay high because the pumping equipment is not up to the task of getting rid of enough water and new engineering equipment is needed. Along with local flood protection groups, he would prefer the reservoir to be three metres from full in autumn. He says the Environment Agency ought to enforce "a programme which requires redesigned, increased capacity water release valves on the dam at Thirlmere [and] reconfigured spill arrangements".

Lord Davies, said that that was, "a matter for the future, but not the immediate future." So that's all right then.

AUDIT COMMISSION

Trough you go, then



SO. Farewell then junketing Audit Commission chief executive Steve Bundred, who leaves the local and health service spending watchdog with a typically modest announcement: "I will move on from the commission with a real sense of achievement, knowing it is in good shape," he told colleagues.

Bundred's "achievements" include putting £10m of taxpayers' money into Icelandic banks (loss so far: £3m) and instituting a neat tax avoidance scheme for the commission's staff (see *Eye* 1240). But he will leave with the grateful thanks of the top 25 commission managers, whom he recently awarded a 6 percent pay rise, consolidating bonuses before they could be slashed, while cutting 100 more junior posts.

In recent months Bundred, 56, has been positioning himself as the country's leading cost-cutter, going into print to call for a public-sector pay freeze and, last week, to claim education spending was ripe for the knife. He could also be found expounding on the theme at the recent Tory conference in what could have been a pitch for a job.

One saving that will be made with Bundred's departure from the Audit Commission is on his annual four-figure troughing bill, since the taxpayer will no longer be required to feed him at restaurants such as L'Escargot and Coq d'Argent (see *Eye* 1244). Which is a subject Bundred is rather touchy about.

When a taxpaying *Eye* reader complained that he had paid for a meal for the country's four top-spending watchdogs – Bundred, Audit Commission chairman Michael O'Higgins and the National Audit Office's chairman and prospective auditor-general – at Quirinale restaurant (a dinner, not a lunch as reported in *Eye* 1247*), he was told the dinner was essential rather than a meeting at one of their offices (about a mile apart in Westminster) since "it would not have been possible… to free up several hours during the working day." But the £240 bill for the dinner obtained by the *Eye* was paid at 8.09pm, suggesting if several hours were indeed needed, it was a very early dinner.

● *Owing to duff information from the commission, we incorrectly identified one of the junketers as the auditor-general at the time, Tim Burr. It was in fact the man lined up to replace him a few weeks later, Amyas Morse.*

TRIALS ABROAD

Defame academy

A LONDON businesswoman faces up to nine months in jail in Portugal for making a confidential complaint about the conduct of a Portuguese lawyer to his regulatory body.

Instead of investigating Serena Wylde's complaint, the Ordem des Advogados (the Portuguese equivalent of the Law Society) passed it on instead to the prosecuting authorities. In a series of Kafkaesque twists, Miss Wylde, 58, was then visited by two armed police officers who ordered her to report to the office of the security police. She was subsequently charged with aggravated criminal defamation under a law which provides for tougher sentences against those who "defame" public officials or lawyers.

Miss Wylde's extraordinary case has been taken up by Fair Trials International, which is concerned not only about freedom of expression but that criminal law in Portugal can be used to put those in positions of power above reproach.

The lawyer Miss Wylde complained about is one Fernando Pimenta de Almeida Borges, son of a former supreme court judge and member of a prominent Portuguese family. He is also seeking damages from her. In a letter to prosecutors, he has said: "It's difficult to fix a sum to indemnify the offence suffered by one who exercises his profession with such honour, dignity and seriousness... Some would say that one's honour has no price... [I consider] adequate to restore the damage suffered by the actions of [Miss Wylde] the payment of a €50,000 indemnity."

The case arises from an access dispute over a property in the Algrave that Miss Wylde inherited from her parents in Praia da Luz. Although both sides initially engaged Portuguese lawyers, they ended up reaching an amicable and signed agreement. Miss Wylde complained to the regulatory body that Mr Pimenta de Almeida Borges, her neighbour's lawyer, had ignored his client's instructions and continued legal proceedings after he had been told that a settlement of the case had been agreed, causing Miss Wylde considerable anxiety.

How a supposedly confidential complaint to a professional regulatory body could result in a knock at the door from two armed police and the prospect of nine months in prison are questions justice secretary Jack Straw will no doubt want answered now he is on the case.

INSOLVENCY

Ethics men

THE clubby, ineffectual self-regulation of the accountancy profession is exposed once again in the story of Premier Motorauctions, the Yorkshire business put into administration on the advice of PricewaterhouseCoopers, generating massive fees for the administrators who turned out to be…. PricewaterhouseCoopers (see *Eye* 1248).

Premier's owner Keith Elliott complained to the Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAEW) over PwC partner Ian Green's conflicting roles as adviser to the company, its bankers and then as administrator. His main beef was that PwC did not show Premier's bankers an offer for the business that would have averted administration.

The ICAEW has responded that it will not investigate this specific allegation as it is "speculation" (in fact, even the bank's lawyers have confirmed that the only offer it received was the one necessitating administration). The professional body has, however, agreed to look at what it calls a "potential conflict of interests between [PwC's] three activities".

It's hard to see how there could not be a conflict of interest for an adviser when one of the options will enrich him vastly more than the others. But this is the position in several cases coming to the *Eye's* attention and for the ICAEW to find against PwC in Premier's case will be an admission that its members have long been acting unethically right under its nose.

PRISONS

Harmed and not dangerous

AS THE inquest opened last week into the death of Rebecca Smith, a 40-year-old mentally ill woman who should not have been detained in a prison, a parliamentary question revealed a grim picture of misery, self-harm and mutilation among female prisoners.

There were 12,938 incidents of women damaging themselves in the country's jails last year. Although women make up only 5 percent of the prison population, they account for more than half the incidents of self-harm. Fortunately only one incident was fatal, but in the past 10 years 75 women have killed themselves in prison.

Last week's inquest heard that Rebecca Smith put a plastic bag over her head in Buckley Hall prison. Her history of mental illness suggested she should have been in a secure psychiatric unit. Other female inmates have found equally desperate ways to end their lives. Julie Hooper, aged 45, slashed her legs and arms and died from her injuries. Alison Colk, aged 36, was found hanging in her cell.

The real scandal, says Frances Crook of the Howard League for Penal Reform, is that most of the women shouldn't be in prison in the first place. Three-quarters of them suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem, two-thirds are alcoholics or addicts, half have been victims of violence and a third have suffered sexual assault. Many will have been brought up in care.

In the past 10 years the number of women being sentenced to jail has doubled to nearly 13,000, the vast majority serving short sentences for theft and dishonesty. According to the Howard League, these women are the most vulnerable. Yet jails are not equipped to cope with their many needs and they end up self-harming – or worse.

The cost to taxpayers of keeping a woman in prison is £36,000 a year, and more than 60 percent of female prisoners go on to commit further crimes on release. Community penalties cost between £2,000 and £8,000, and 40-50 percent of women re-offend. Switching funds from prison to drug treatment, probation and community sentences would save money, stop more people becoming victims of crime – and help reduce the misery of self-inflicted injuries, and worse, behind closed doors.

Serco clowns

SECURITY firm Serco's crass attempt to make the unacceptable acceptable backfired spectacularly last month when it invited local bigwigs into its immigration detention centre at Yarls Wood, near Bedford.

The occasion was the opening of new classrooms for the growing number of children incarcerated for the "offence" of being the offspring of asylum seekers. But embarrassed guests were unable to decide which of the afternoon's "entertainments" was the most excruciating.

Was it the boy prisoner prompted to sing "Happy Birthday" to his mother; the mural featuring Hollywood-styled child prisoners' handprints framed by stars; the asylum seekers assembled in blue gowns to sing "My sweet Lord"; or the image on the complimentary mug and coaster set of two smiling parents, two happy children and the words "compassion, commitment and respect for all"? None of these had been shown to the children, some of whom had been snatched from their homes in dawn raids and separated from their parents.

If the visit was an attempt to show that children can "thrive" in detention, it was never going to work. The staged event followed a damning study by medical experts in the international journal *Child Abuse and Neglect*, highlighting the traumatic effect detention can have on children. The study of 24 children – at Yarl's Wood detention centre itself – found some were so stressed they had regressed to bedwetting and soiling during the day. Others had developed anxiety and depression, lost weight and developed sleep problems, headaches and abdominal pains. In one child there had been a re-emergence of post-traumatic stress. Others at Yarl's Wood developed sexualised behaviour.

The report found that some children had been briefly fostered out before being reunited with their parents. One mother was separated from her breastfeeding infant for two weeks because of an outbreak of chicken pox. Families also had limited access to proper assessment, treatment or support.

"As doctors, we ask for safeguards to protect these vulnerable children from further harm in detention," said Dr Ann Lorek, consultant paediatrician and one of the report's authors.

Private cells

WHILE "tough on crime" ministers fail to provide cheaper alternatives to custodial sentences in the community for offenders, the private sector continues to make big profits by providing more and more jails.

A freedom of information request found that the tendering process alone for two new prisons in London and Liverpool cost nearly £2.5m. This only covered the professional advice of lawyers, accountants, consultants and PFI promoters at Partnership UK. Not included were the costs of staff at the National Offender Management Service, nor those incurred buying sites or securing planning permission. Whatever happened to value for money?

DEFENCE

Trouble in stores

A REPORT on mismanagement at the body responsible for storing and distributing equipment for the armed forces, obtained by the *Eye* under freedom of information laws, reveals an organisation whose bosses routinely flouted the rules but who, in the finest traditions of government cock-ups, have escaped scot-free.

Eye 1238 reported that the MoD's defence fraud analysis unit had been sent into the Defence Storage Distribution Agency (DSDA) to look at the way it had handed out contracts. DSDA chief executive Neil Firth (pictured) – brought in from parcels firm UPS and bent on commercialising the agency ahead of a potential privatisation – and finance director Tim Gall had both been suspended.

The fraud unit's report details £40m worth of "non-compliant, off-contract" spending between 2006 and 2008, disregarding government spending rules and leaving the DSDA open to legal action from suppliers who missed out. Much of the money, £11m in 2008/09 (a twenty-fold increase on pre-Firth days), went on "manpower substitutes" to replace sacked civil servants and the use of "interim" managers at three times the price of civil servants for extended periods.

The investigators were particularly scathing of Firth, who was "directly involved in off-contract procurement in the small sample of invoices examined" and "placed himself in a compromising position by promoting off-contract procurement with UPS, a company where he was a former director… exacerbated by him tasking a former UPS employee to undertake this procurement". The other ex-UPS man was DSDA "change management director" Paul Wilson.

Firth also spent £40,000 on "personal leadership coaching" with a consultancy called Bubworks, again breaking the rules. He justified the cost by claiming that Bubworks could "be called upon at any time, day, night or weekend, to offer advice and counselling…" It also allowed Firth "to discuss and offload pressure and stress". Meanwhile, in three years he had failed to attend the government course on "public accountability for chief executives" that he had been told to attend when appointed.

While investigators stopped short of alleging fraud, they concluded that "an environment has been created conducive to fraud". So was Firth chastened? Not a bit of it. The investigators noted his "dismissive attitude to future non-compliancy… he considered the DSDA board beyond accountability for their actions".

But that's no bar to an MoD career. When the fraud report went to senior MoD mandarin Trevor Woolley he concluded: "There is insufficient evidence that Mr Firth personally and willfully violated or encouraged others to violate the commercial regulations to sustain a charge of misconduct." He immediately returned to work. The only man for whom Woolley wanted to consider disciplinary action was DSDA commercial director Doug Doherty, but he couldn't pursue this as Doherty was himself one of the "interim" appointments and not subject to civil service rules.

Only one person appears to have lost out: long-term "interim" HR director Patricia Hollis, whose cavalier approach came in for stinging criticism and whose contract was terminated. Woolley noted that on one management training contract "there is also a suspicion that the requirement to go to competition was deliberately ignored so that the HR director could let the contract to a company that she had family connections with."

DSDA, which is about to be part-privatised, is a prime target for a future Tory government's extensive "outsourcing" ambitions. The idea is to bring some much-needed private sector discipline and efficiency into public services of the sort practised by, er, Neil Firth and Co in the stores.

MILITARY SALES

Bad deals on wheels

A FORMER Metropolitan Police commander turned businessman was involved in a scandalous sale to Iraq of armoured vehicles that never arrived, leaving Iraqis to face bombs and bullets unprotected while company directors pocketed millions.

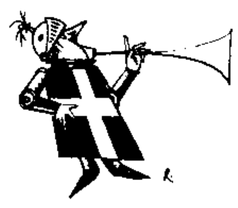
US prosecutors moved against an American director in the scheme, but the UK authorities are not pursuing Graham James (pictured) and the other British directors.

James left the Met in 2003 after being suspended over expenses irregularities. He repaid the expenses and retired. He was also one of the three police tribunal members who ruled that Sergeant Gurpal Virdi sent himself racist mail in 2000 – a false charge overturned by an employment tribunal (see *Eyes passim*).

James became a director of a company called Alchemie Technology and chairman of its subsidiary, Advanced Protection Technology, or APTx. In 2005 Alchemie and APTx were paid more than £5m to deliver armoured vehicles to the Iraqi government: Alchemie and APTx offered Russian-built bulletproof buses to get Iraqi civil servants to work, along with armoured police vehicles. The companies got the money, but the vehicles didn't arrive.

In June this year, the US president of Alchemie, Benjamin Kafka, admitted to American prosecutors that he obtained the Iraqi cash with fake invoices. He is co-operating with US investigators. However, the Serious Fraud Office did not respond to the *Eye*'s inquiries about the British Alchemie directors. Why ever not?

EYE TOLD YOU SO



Mind the Steps

NEARLY eight years ago the *Eye* exposed the sale by the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise of Britain's tax offices to a Bermudan company under a PFI deal, codenamed STEPS and designed to enable the new owners Mapeley to, er, avoid tax. The scandalous episode was set out in all its tawdry detail in a 2003 *Private Eye* special report, "*The Artful Dodgers*", by the late Paul Foot.

The Revenue always insisted that despite the tax avoidance it was still a good deal, based on the unlikely promise from Mapeley that it would not make profit on the 20-year deal until selling the buildings (tax-free) at the end. In 2004 this was cheerfully accepted in a favourable report from the National Audit Office, but unsurprisingly soon turned out wildly inaccurate.

Over the next two years the *Eye* regularly pointed out that a) Mapeley was making much more money than it said it would; and b) the government was paying out much more than it said it would. An analysis of the dodgy numbers in *Eye* 1150, in January 2006, concluded: "Now that the government's and Mapeley's assurances about the costs, the profits and the amount of tax avoided are all shown to be false, will the NAO or parliament return to arguably the most outrageous PFI deal on record?"

The NAO duly took a fresh look. And now, nearly halfway through the contract, it has reached the conclusion that *Eye* readers did all those years ago: "Eight years on [HMRC] has not achieved value for money on the contract so far..." It notes that the deal is expected to cost £570m more than anticipated and records a litany of ongoing troubles.

HMRC "has not assessed the benefits realised by Mapeley under the STEPS deal nor the profitability of the Mapeley group", "lacks a shared strategy with Mapeley", "does not monitor the overall cost of the contract" and "only began to develop a detailed business continuity plan to manage the risk of Mapeley default in January 2009" – default not being an impossibility given what is known of Mapeley's current financial troubles.

Taxpayers will be pleased to hear that this is the kind of deal the government proposes with *more* public property under its "operational efficiency programme".

Pilots victory

A GROUP of pilots sacked by Cathay Pacific eight years ago finally won their case for unfair dismissal last month, along with damages for defamation after airline bosses accused them of being unprofessional and acting against the best interests of Hong Kong.

Eye 1057 reported the sacking of 49 pilots in 2001 after they took part, along with colleagues, in a union-led "maximum safety strategy". This was a kind of work-to-rule, intended to counter what they claimed was under-staffing by the airline, resulting in pilots being asked to fly for too long or being called into work without adequate rest between flights.

The company denied it had sacked the pilots for union activities, instead claiming it was their "conduct" that led to dismissal. But the judge in the Hong Kong high court found that Cathay had "no hard evidence of such anti-company or anti-social conduct as it alleges" and that during the trial Cathay "could not identify a single instance where any of the plaintiffs manifested such behaviour".

The pilots were also awarded damages because public statements by company bosses Tony Tyler and Philip Chen had accused the "49ers" of being unprofessional, having poor employment records and not caring about the best interests of the airline or of Hong Kong itself. Eighteen of the pilots took Cathay to court, though one died before the case was completed, with damages totalling around HK$55m (just over £4m).

QUANGO BOSSES' PAY

Trembles all round!

HIGHLY-PAID quango bosses are desperate to avoid being thrown on David Cameron's promised post-election bonfire.

One local government quango, 4Ps, has already fallen on its own sword to avoid being axed. Now called Local Partnerships, it has merged with the local delivery arm of the mother of all Labour's quangos, Partnerships UK (PUK), which is itself hoping to avoid the chop if the Tories form the next government.

A local government association report last month highlighted the eye-watering salaries of many quango bosses and their henchpersons. PUK supremo James Stewart, for instance, earns £431,000 a year. Another £1m-plus is shared between PUK's five board members.

At Partnerships for Schools, the superquango in charge of the secondary schools rebuilding programme Building Schools for the Future, chief executive Tim Byles trousers £260,000, with another four directors receiving nearly £500,000 between them. This despite the fact that the National Audit Office criticised PfS's high staff costs and performance targets last year, and the Commons public accounts select committee accused PfS of "wasting public money" on expensive consultants (PfS and the department for children, schools and families together spent £11.1m of taxpayers' cash on them last year).

Such profligacy has not gone unnoticed. It formed part of a scathing critique of PfS published in August by David Cameron's favourite think-tank, Policy Exchange. PfS did not make any friends when it tried to pressure some of those interviewed in the report (successfully in many cases) to withdraw criticisms (*Eye* 1241) – thereby substantiating claims in the report that PfS sometimes acted in a bullying manner.

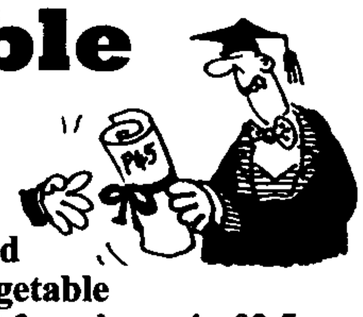
One shadow cabinet member recently privately described PfS as "nightmarish". And Michael Gove, the shadow schools secretary, has attacked the "giant quango" for "lavishing" money on consultants rather than building schools and warning it that it would have to "slim down" its bureaucracy.

Such attention might explain why Byles and his henchmen have recently made concessions to their critics. After rubbishing the Royal Institute of British Architects privately and publicly for suggesting that PFI schemes often wasted vast amounts of money (fancy!), PfS has adopted a gentler approach, inviting RIBA to help with the next round of school design. And not long ago PfS was describing so-called "smart PFI", Riba's preferred option – which involves schools earlier in the design process and is far cheaper – as "illegal" under EU law. Now PfS admits it might be worth a look after all.

It seems Byles hopes that sucking up to Tory frontbenchers and being less dismissive of critics will help him keep his job. The smart money is on the agency surviving in some form – but under new, less extravagantly remunerated management.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Vegetable stew



WHEN Warwick University snapped up the UK's National Vegetable Research Station in 2004 for a bargain £2.5m, agriculture minister Lord Whitty said the 473-acre working farm at Wellesbourne, with its unique labs, glasshouses and field research facilities, could now "look forward to a stable future and concentrate on what it does best – delivering high quality science for the benefit of the horticulture industry and others."

Just five years later and that stable future has ended. On 16 November, Warwick's ruling senate agreed plans will see around a third of Wellesbourne staff made redundant, while the rest move to the life sciences department on the main campus. Staff believe Wellesbourne itself will close entirely in 2012 when "transitional" funding from Defra runs out.

Scientists are wondering what went wrong. Now known as Warwick HRI (Horticulture Research International), the farm/lab was ranked top in the UK for agriculture and food science in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

To ease the 2004 takeover, Defra guaranteed £36.2m over eight years for research and development, plus an extra £1.3m to maintain the Wellesbourne gene bank. Yet Warwick says it cannot now afford to keep the site going.

Scientists and vegetable farmers' organisations are furious at the lack of discussion about the move. Scientists were told of the proposal via their union, Prospect, just 11 days before the senate meeting and there was no consultation with Defra, the research council or the national Horticulture Advisory Board.

At the UK Onion and Carrot Conference last month, Neil Bragg, boss of the Horticulture Development Company, which divvies up the statutory levy taken from farmers to fund research and is another major funder of HRI, said he was "flabbergasted" by the lack of discussion. Meanwhile *Horticulture Week* blames Defra for years of cuts to research funding, but said Warwick was showing "complete disregard" for a prime facility it had been gifted at a knock-down price.

Earlier this year the upland farming centre at Bronydd Mawr in west Wales met a similar fate (see *Eye* 1242). Once part of the disbanded national Institute for Grassland and Environmental Research, its world class science was thought to have been saved when it was bought by Aberystwyth University, but with no extra funds to keep it going, the university put it up for sale.

Under the terms of the Warwick sale, if the university sells or develops the land within 15 years, it must pay a share of the proceeds to Defra. But that does nothing to safeguard food science in the UK; and within five years of being handed over to a university, another leading international research facility will be lost. Let that be a lesson to all those who would like to sell off scientific assets like the Met Office that are still in public hands.

Stupid letter of the week?

REGULAR readers will be well aware of the dangers of cut-and-paste form letters, which often result in garbled and nonsensical messages to customers... such as this classic received by Chris Hartley.

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In the City

DETERMINED to prove to a sceptical world that Britain is tough on overseas corruption, the Serious Farce Office may have to decide whether it is up for taking on a friend of Lord Mandelson or would prefer to leave any such job to the Americans.

The man at the centre of this dilemma is Victor Dahdaleh, businessman, philanthropist and friend of the famous. His walls and websites are decorated with pictures of him with well-known political figures. Dahdaleh – a London-based, Jordanian-born Canadian citizen – is involved in an investigation by the US Justice Department, assisted by the SFO, after he was accused of participating in a "massive, outrageous fraud" on the state-controlled Aluminium Bahrain, owners of one of the Gulf's largest aluminium smelters. Dahdaleh denies the allegations.

Dahdaleh has known Mandelson for several years, although not described as a close friend. He and his charitable foundation have donated to the Policy Network think tank, where the Business Secretary is president. Dahdaleh has also donated to another Labour-supporting think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research.

"I hope you're not anticipating a rapid return to the bonus culture, Cratchett"

Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) made the allegations in a US civil action early last year against the US aluminium giant ALCOA and its agent Dahdaleh. The civil case was stayed at the request of the US Justice Department which launched an ongoing criminal investigation into Alba's allegations that ALCOA had "bribed one or more former senior officials" of the company and "a senior government official". "In exchange for the bribes officials agreed on behalf of Alba to pay excessive prices for alumina", it was claimed. Alba is seeking damages in excess of $1bn. Alba alleged: "The bribes were sent though a series of shell companies that [the] defendants ultimately controlled." It was claimed that, since 1993, Alba had made payments for alumina supplied by ALCOA in Australia to offshore companies controlled by Dahdaleh.

Because Dahdaleh was based in London and had been operating bank accounts here and in Jersey and Guernsey, it was not long before the Justice Department was seeking help from the SFO under the usual mutual legal assistance arrangements. Several meetings between the SFO and Justice Department officials have taken place in recent months to discuss the ALCOA investigation.

That investigation is run by the same team that has BAE Systems in its sights. The SFO is also threatening BAE with prosecution for making corrupt payments regarding contracts in South Africa, Tanzania, the Czech Republic and Romania. It is expected to send a dossier to the Attorney General Lady Scotland in the next week or so seeking approval for a prosecution. BAE, meanwhile, is playing a hardball game and refusing to settle for the big numbers the SFO is seeking while looking for a global settlement deal with the Americans and the SFO.

It is understood that one result of co-operation between the Justice Department and the SFO on ALCOA was a visit to the offices of Dahdaleh's company DADCO (UK) and his nearby Belgravia home several weeks ago. Doubtless nothing so crude as a raid which would have been unnecessary as any such visit would naturally have caused no concern to Dahdaleh, who, as he has stated that he will vigorously contest Alba's claims, would be only too happy to co-operate with any SFO or US inquiries.

It is said by those close to the ALCOA case that the SFO now has to decide whether to limit its investigation to supporting the Americans or, given the evidence, launch its own full-scale investigation to establish whether any offences have been committed here.

The main target of the US investigation is ALCOA and its senior suits. As is the way of such investigation, ALCOA immediately established an expensive internal review of its dealings with Alba and Dahdaleh, the aim being to establish any evidence of wrongdoing and then negotiate a deal with the Justice Department – a large fine and some guilty pleas. So far ALCOA has resisted such a deal, claiming that there is no clear evidence against the company while co-operating with the investigation. However, if presented with evidence, then in shareholders' interests it will be looking to get out the chequebook rather than go to trial.

And that stage may have moved a little closer, as there are suggestions that at least one former insider has now come forward to provide detailed evidence of the arrangements involving Alba.

Until recently the Justice Department was said to be prepared to concentrate on ALCOA and leave any possible case against Dahdaleh to the SFO. It rarely prosecutes foreigners involved in corruption cases, often preferring to name them as unindicted co-conspirators with American corporations or citizens. That way lengthy or difficult/impossible extradition cases or trials can be avoided.

This was seen as both good news and bad news for Elm Street. Good because, evidence permitting, it potentially could have a high-profile case piggy-backed on the ALCOA investigation, bad because it would also have to prove any such case and that could have BAE-style problems.

The Alba case was the result of an investigation into state-owned enterprises begun by a faction in the ruling Bahrain royal family targeting certain influential figures close to the king, a power play not unknown among ruling elites with succession in mind. That investigation discovered not just the ALCOA allegations but also evidence that two senior Alba managers had allegedly corrupt relationships with metal traders who were paying commissions into bank accounts in Liechtenstein.

The former managers are now being tried in Bahrain for money laundering, the SFO having assisted Bahrain with its investigation. Traders Glencore International have already settled a case with Alba by paying a reported $20m while the Japanese group Sojitz is also expected to be the target of civil action by Alba.

The ALCOA case, however, involves significant political figures being on the take in Bahrain, which means there may be problems obtaining evidence, given the political sensitivity and potential embarrassment. There is also the likely BAE/Saudi Arabia defence – that any payments made to prominent Bahrainis were approved by the government there! If so, there was then there was no offence under the antiquated UK law for acts before 2002, which requires the interests of the bribee's principal/employer to have been harmed. All the BAE kickbacks in Saudi Arabia were known and approved by the Saudis – which was a legal excuse given for the political decision to drop the SFO case.

However, for the SFO there could be a presentational problem if it took no action and the Justice Department negotiated a deal with ALCOA, who admitted corruption and incriminated Dahdaleh. That would be a replay of what is expected to happen over BAE and Saudi Arabia, where the Americans are expected to achieve a settlement on charges which the British government prevented the SFO from pursuing. It would also repeat what is currently happening with London lawyer Jeffrey Tesler, who is facing extradition to the US for allegedly facilitating bribery in Nigeria by the Halliburton group following the plea bargain and $579m fine negotiated by Halliburton and its associates.

This is the first attempt to extradite a defendant from the UK to face US corruption charges. The SFO took no action against Tesler. The extradition battle is certain to include whether Tesler's actions were illegal at the time under UK law. A proper Bribery Act still awaits being put in place next year.

The SFO has stepped up its campaign against overseas corruption, obtaining its first conviction this year – against Mabey & Johnson – while negotiating settlements with contractors AMEC and last year Balfour Beatty, and charging a former executive of DePuy International. The latter case followed an inquiry that began in the US after disclosures made by DePuy's parent, Johnson & Johnson. A model for ALCOA?

However, the SFO has achieved much less with its long-running Iraq oil-for-food investigation. Apart from Mabey & Johnson, only two oil traders have so far been charged despite allegations having been made against multinational pharma groups AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline and Eli Lilly. And the Iraq investigation is expected to wind down next year.

If the Justice Department moves against ALCOA, this will put pressure on the SFO. Those close to the US investigation suggest that such a decision by the SFO on ALCOA may be imminent. If the SFO decides to step up its investigation from merely helping the Americans to examining a possible prosecution – assuming the evidence is there – that will not be welcome news in Labour circles where Dahdaleh is well-known not just to Mandelson but also to Tony Blair.

Addressing a June 2006 meeting of the Canada-United Kingdom Chamber of Commerce – Dahdaleh was president until last year – Mandelson praised "Victor my friend" as "a business dynamo, a public-spirited figure and a big-hearted personality all rolled into one".

They shared a common interest at that time when Mandelson was the EU trade commissioner. Bahrain had been pressing for a reduction or removal of EU tariffs on aluminium imports. This was halved to 3 percent in 2007. Mandelson was in favour of removing the tariff as part of a long-planned free trade deal with the Gulf states. Bahrain and Dubai are the two largest aluminium producers in the region.

In 2007, Policy Network produced a booklet by Mandelson entitled "The European Union in the Global Age". It thanked Dahdaleh, "who has generously supported our research programme on the EU".

In June this year Mandelson and Blair addressed a London conference on climate change "generously and actively supported by the Victor Phillip Dahdaleh Foundation". The conference was hosted by Policy Network and the London School of Economics, where Dahdaleh is a governor. Dahdaleh has been a generous benefactor to the LSE, whose other governors include Cherie Blair. He is chairman of its Centre for the Study of Global Governance.

Blair also flattered Dahdaleh when addressing a

☛ *See over...*

NUMBER CRUNCHING

2 Banks that collapsed despite clean audit certificates from beancounters PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG

£20m Fees received by PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG for advising on the ensuing bank bailout

lunch for the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce in October 2006. "Victor, as you know, is very influential in the global initiative of president Clinton," Blair told the gathering in London, which was sponsored by Dahdaleh's Dadco Group.

Dahdaleh and his foundation have given between $1m and $5m to Bill Clinton's charitable foundation. Dahdaleh is a trustee. Clinton addressed a meeting of the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce in London hosted by Dahdaleh and sponsored by Dadco in 2005.

And last October Dahdaleh was on stage when Clinton was awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University in Montreal. Dahdaleh is a board member of the Canadian university's trust. Describing him as a "personal friend" of the former president, McGill said Dahdaleh acted as the facilitator in getting Clinton to attend.

No doubt President Clinton and Lord Mandelson will be sure that their friend Victor Dahdaleh is exonerated by the investigations into the clearly unmerited Alba allegations – as he insists will prove to be the case.

EYE readers since 2007 will be amused to learn that the SFO is seeking information that might be useful to its investigation into old favourite Eddie Davenport.

Davenport was arrested last week and charged in relation to the activities of his Gresham outfit. Fast Eddie is in custody facing conspiracy and money-laundering charges.

ANOTHER *Eye* favourite whose luck has finally run out is London 2012 chairman Lord Coe's benefactor and serial-failed company promoter Peter Abbey.

After many adjournments since September 2008, Abbey was finally made bankrupt on 26 October by the taxman. Abbey had been claiming to resident in Monaco and to be visiting the UK only within the maximum 90 nights a year then allowed by HMRC.

This is the second time Abbey has been made bankrupt; the first was in 1985. In 1994, he avoided bankruptcy by entering into an individual voluntary arrangement with his creditors, who were owed more than £500,000. Abbey raised £1m for Complete Leisure Group, which acquired Coe's service company and the image rights to the double Olympic gold medallist's brand. Abbey is no longer involved with CLG, which has registered losses for the past three years.

'Slicker'

100 Years Ago...

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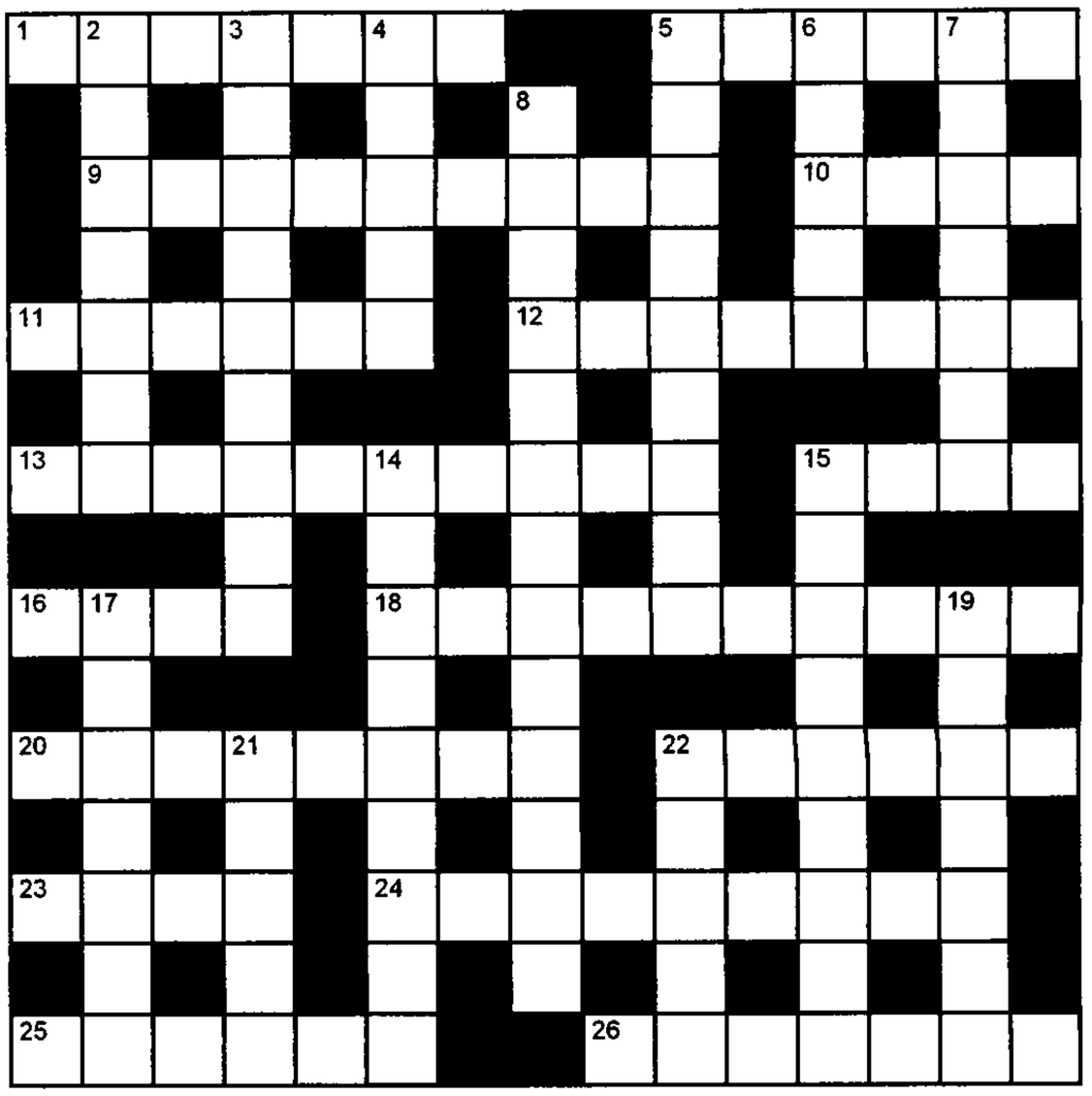
– From The Financiers and the Nation *by former cabinet minister Thomas Johnstone, published in 1934.*

EYE CROSSWORD 406

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 16 December 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Maybe arse wants gold provided – and diamonds (7)
5 "Humble" party does a U-turn inside minute (Clegg's third way) (6)
9 What blundering minister seeks? Neo-gestapo suppressing state (9)
10 See 16ac.
11 Reviled copper, openly gay, makes you scoff (3,3)
12/23 Bingo! Darling fixed a "tiding over" advance (8,4)
13 Jeremy Clarkson's gay? Gee, bring out the queen! (6-4)
15 See 21dn.
16/10 Screwed rugby player and relaxed (4-4)
18 Formalise the relationship between two bondage freaks? (3,3,4)
20 Broadcast by King George being gobbled by cool lock-keeper? (8)
22 Balls caught in revolving seat? Calm down! (6)
23 See 12ac.
24 Creating peers? (None organised before show of wealth) (9)
25 Dolly's bust: it had a number of unfortunate names (6)
26 Pathetic prey, Gordon, having no right party issue (7)

DOWN

2 Presenter who went too far in one (he scored) (7)
3 Almighty brown trouser moment for those you put it into? (4,2,3)
4 The bloke's surrounded by court tits (5)
5 This woman's top affected March air outside temperature (9)
6 Get pants off and have sex, mounted, with Silver (5)
7 8 down's minute parts (7)
8 A Prescott treat is what *Eye* readers got in the case of Crossword 402 (6,7)
14 They wouldn't keep an artist in residence (9)
15 What's in store for the barren old goat, really? (2,7)
17 A Labour about to ditch union leader for one, is mostly OPEC's concern (4,3)
19 Pentagon taking sides when Obama's chief can't go bombing? (7)
21/15ac. It's not giving up sex and punctuation produces such a discharging organ (5,4)
22 Certainly not pissed off, Boers (5)

Crossword 405 winner: JASON HILL

ACROSS: 1 Casual 4 Stuart 9 Epic 10 Drug pusher 11 Defector 12 Expert 13 Charmer 17 Show 18 Felt tip 20 Studio 22 Alfresco 24 Private Eye 25/15 Step down 26 Canada 27 Hard-on.

DOWN: 1 Copper 2 Sacred cow 3 Audit 5 Top secret 6 Aesop 7 The Crown 8 Supreme Leader 14 Affronted 15 Depressed 16 Rhetoric 19 Screen 21 Devon 23 Freda.

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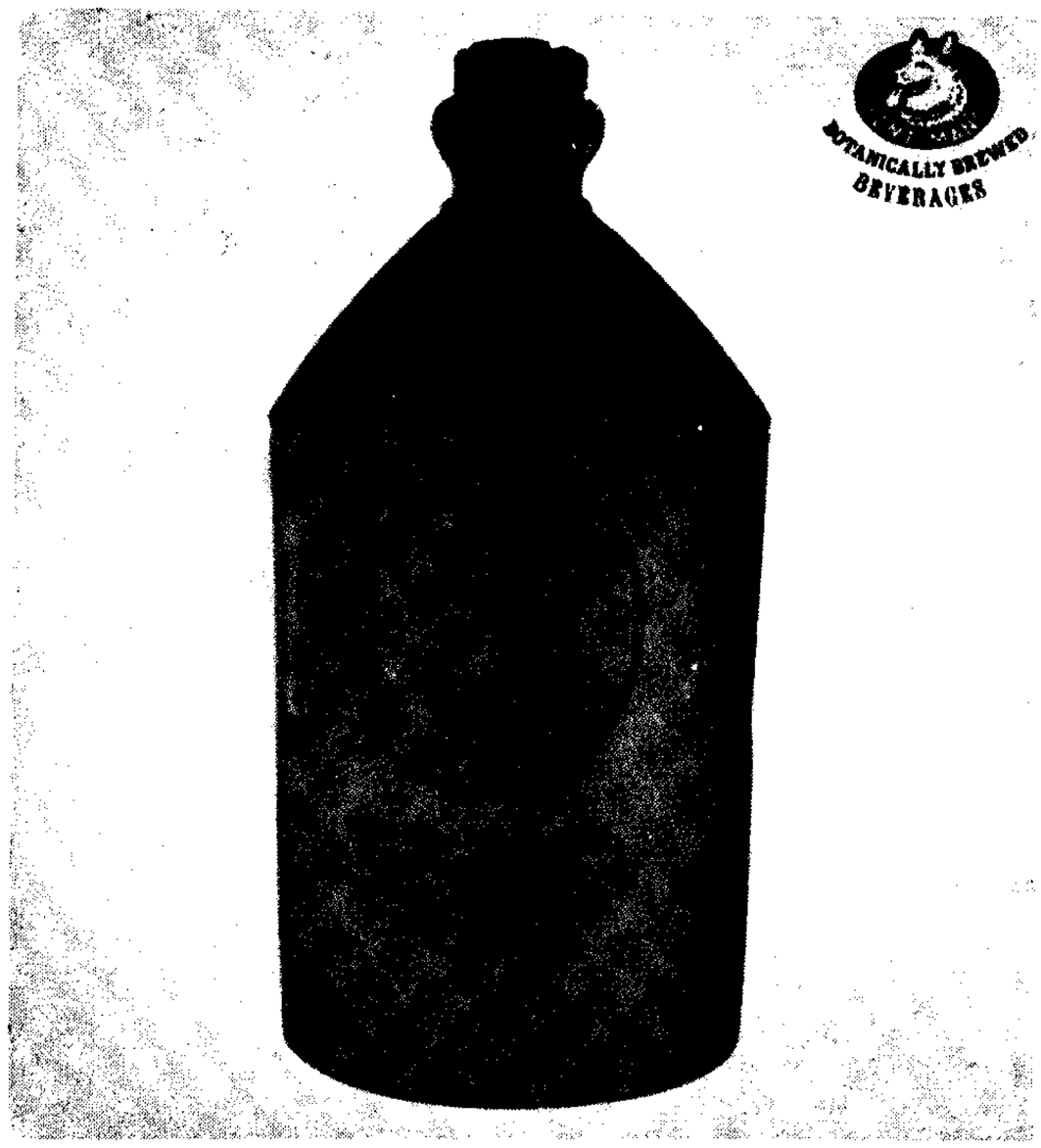

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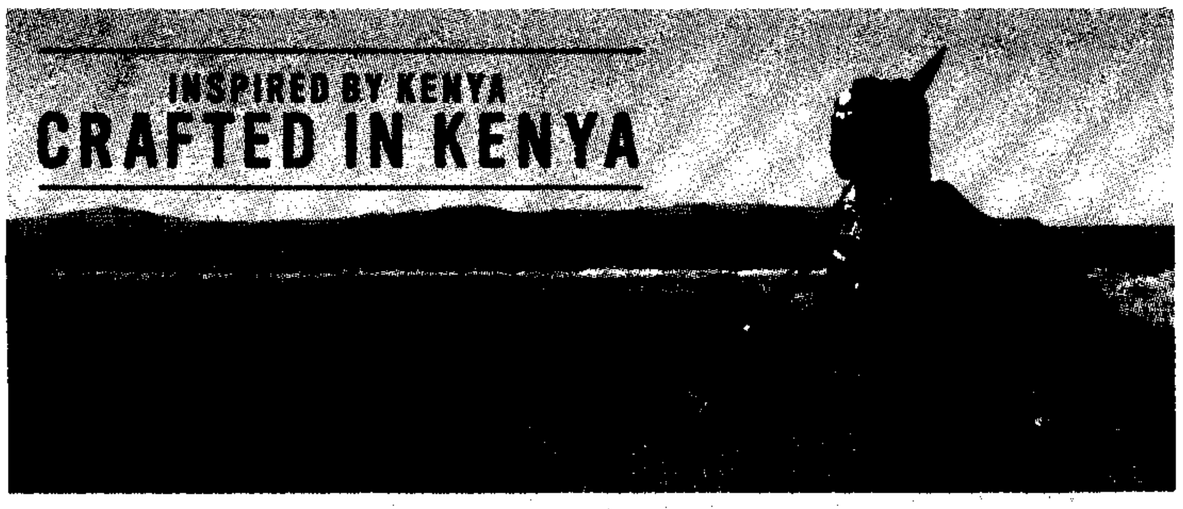

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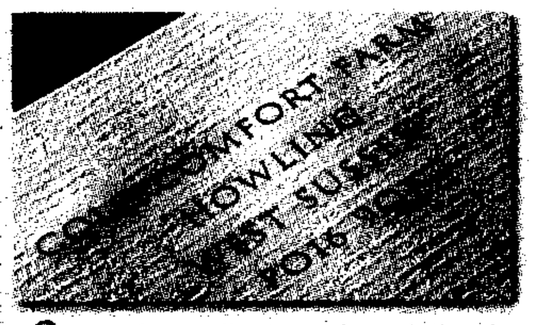

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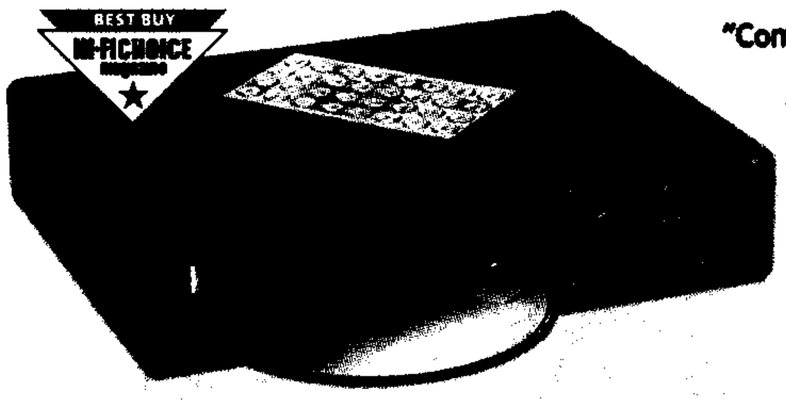

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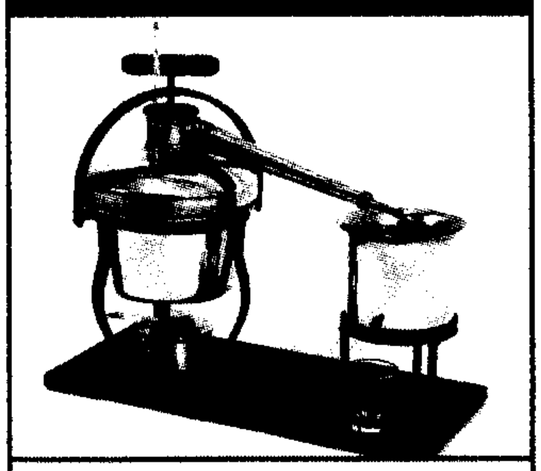

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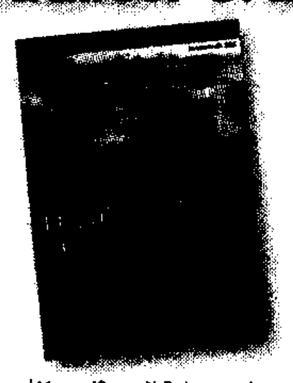

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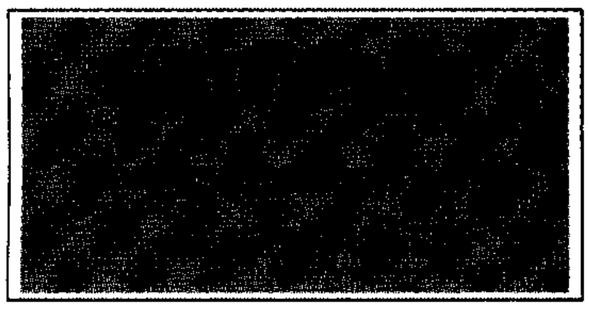

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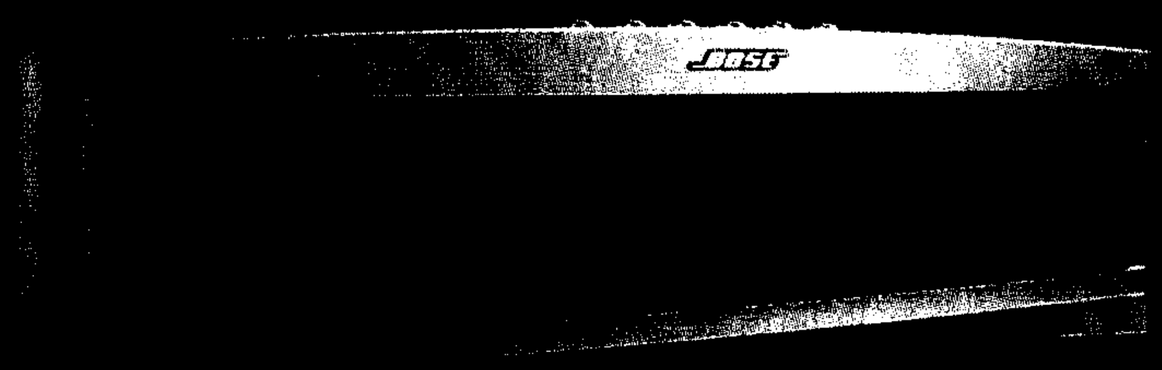

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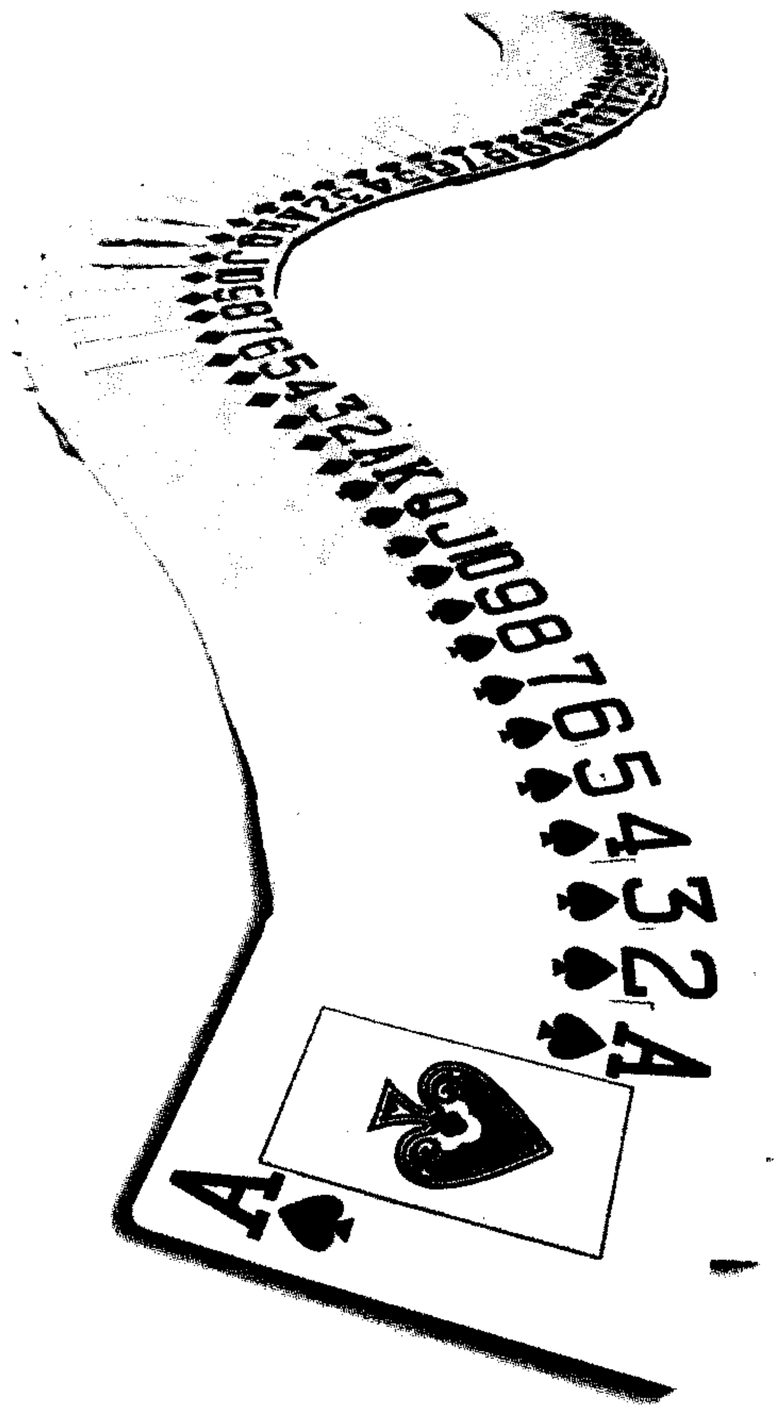

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